

THREE WOMEN IN ONE BOAT

BY CONSTANCE MacEWAN



THREE WOMEN IN ONE BOAT
(To Say Nothing About The Cat.)

THREE WOMEN IN ONE BOAT.

A River Sketch.

BY

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“SOAP,” “MISS BEAUCHAMP,” “A PHILISTINE,” ETC

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THREE WOMEN IN ONE BOAT.

CHAPTER I.

“WE TALK ABOUT IT”

IT ALL CAME about this way. Selina Davidson wags my great friend, and Sabina Ann Pipkin was her great friend (that means Selina's.) You must not expect me to be grammatical, epigrammatical, or any other “atical.” I'm a sort of girl to show the world that what brains may have denied to us three, muscles and biceps have done for us, and who was always a dunce at school and a duffer out of it; but I'm determined how we “three women in one boat” didn't make half such a mess of it as Mr. Jerome's “three men in a boat”—not by a long way.

As I said before, it all came about this way.

Selina Davidson came to tea at my rooms, Girton. I was going “down”; in fact, we were all going “down,” They had rusticated me because I would have young Arnold to tea, and young Arnold was not my brother's friend, but only my brother's, brother's, cousin's, great aunt's, nephew's, sister's, brother-in-law's, niece's uncle .

When I had made out the genealogical calendar I thought how mistaken people were to say I had no brains, and I nearly wept. I didn't quite, because the calendar I have just alluded to was looking on, and I thought of the unbecoming moist look of tears, and be as attractive as Sabina Ann Pipkin, who is my rival in arms (I mean out of arms.) Sabina's no baby, awfully old, long in the tooth, and all that sort of thing. But as I said before—perhaps I had better say, as I said behind; I'm sick of that “before”—Selina Davidson came to afternoon tea, and, of course, Sabina Ann Pipkin was with her. Selina had Mr. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* all under her arm—under her thumb, as she said; for Selina's a bit of a “wag,” if not quite a wit—in fact, we “wag” much more than we ought, and it

nearly got us into trouble, "we three women in one boat," but not quite; but I'll come to that by and by. Selina had my fine china cup in her hand, and was talking, as she always does talk, nineteen 'the dozen. When I saw the cup go, and she giving forth with nothing but the handle between her finger and thumb. I was disgusted; not so Sabina Ann Pipkin; she simply shrieked;

"The tea was too heavy for the cup, and the cup too fine for Selina's strong grip! You are only fit to tow boat downstream, you great big creature!"

I saw Selina turn colour. Selina always turns colour at the least thing. She says it's sensitiveness, but I say, "Not at all; it's liver." O, how we have discussed that question of the liver! Brought out in every possible edition and form down to Dissent and up to Ritual. All diversities of opinion, we agree, are "liver." Liver makes war and peace; liver is the great distinction between grave and gay, saint and sinner. "Attend to your liver!" I always end up with, when Selina trims her tongue with a scorpion's dressing, and sets everybody right, from the Queen on the throne to the pew-opener at St James's, Piccadilly.

"Now, Selina, sit down," I said, "don't sit up, Sabina Ann Pipkin meant nothing by calling you a creature. We are all creatures, fond of creature comfort. Take it that way. Don't—don't look like that! Don't "fly-up" because Sabrina Ann Pipkin wanted to give you a "fly-down." Sabrina's a bit jealous today; the Calendar was round to see me, and when that happens Sabrina always calls everybody a 'creature'."

"It was inspiration made me look like that," said Selina, who still held the handle of the fragile cup in her hand, while the broken pieces lay at her feet.

"Sit down, dear" I said, "it was liver."

Then Selina let me have it. She said I was a wicked, diabolical creature, with one idea in my head, like those heathen mythology creatures with one eye in the centre of their forehead. She said—but what did she say? She was as fluent as Mr. Gladstone when he addresses

anybody and everybody on any and every subject, and as yellow as an East Indian who has just landed at Southampton, and is squabbling at the Customs over his cargo of presents, for which his expectant friends are eagerly waiting.

"What did the liver mean when you took it for inspiration?" I said when at last she stopped, and then only because Mr. Jerome's book fell from under her arm, and made such a bang on Tintoretto's back that the darling leapt up on my shoulder, and growled like a dog with rage. Tintoretto is my cat. More of Tintoretto by and by.

Selina had gone to the glass over by the mantelpiece, and was arranging her veil. She had been talking all the time with it knotted behind her hat, and one end gyrating. Men would not understand how devastating the effect of this had been; that's why I always like men. They seem to me to be so guileless and simple beside women; notice nothing except broad distinctions.

"Meant," she said (passing by that nasty jar about the liver)—"meant," and here she rammed a hairpin into her back hair, and caught in her veil—"meant that *we* three will out-rival *those* three" and she pointed at book, which lay upside-down on the floor.) "Meant" and she expanded her chest in true sculling style—"meant 'three women in one boat'."

A dead silence fell as Selina flung her challenge. Who would take it up—Sabina Ann Pipkin, Tintoretto, or I? I looked hard at Sabina, Sabina looked hard at Tintoretto, and Tintoretto stared hard out of window—a way a cat has. I think cats are very discreet; the race have been so cruelly treated, and have failed so utterly in founding homes for themselves like dogs, that I think this "look out of window" of theirs means, Truth is not evidence, according to law—something like that in their minds. When the house is let, that being shut-out style of thing till the new-comers arrive, that lets the mice accumulate

till the family return, has given cats in general that far-away look.

The dead silence became oppressive at last. There is nothing, to my mind, so oppressive as a dead silence, simply because silence is never dead—it's so awfully, fearfully, spitefully alive. I hope you know what I mean when I get paradoxical—that's what Selina calls my "ass's bray." Sabina Ann Pipkin takes a different view of my paradoxical fits. She says it's liver on the brain, working the cells of the brain. But to go looking backward, as I said before, the silence at last became dreadful—it was a silence that could be heard; it became so alive with the intense and bursting desire we all had to out-rival those "three men in a boat."

Tintoretto was the first to move. She jumped deliberately from my shoulder to the floor, and sat down on the cover of *Three Men in a Boat*. Then she licked her paws and shut her left eye.

Tintoretto has always had this horrid profane way of winking. It was not the sun in her eyes, for she did it in November, in the middle of a dense London fog. It was a nasty old Jewish trick evolved in this cat. I was often ashamed of her, more especially when she winked at the Calendar.

"Well?" said Salina.

"Well?" said Sabina Ann Pipkin.

"Well?" said I. Then as if moved by one inspiration, we seized hands, and capered in a wild ring round Tintoretto seated on the book.

Selina's end veil got loose again, and wagged frantically, and Sabina's new American screwed-in pivot-tooth, of which she is so awfully proud, took the opportunity of falling out. As for me, I was always as downright in-and-out tidy as an old maid, and I hung together in that mad romp as perfectly as the most approved of the type. Not a hair turned, not one.

When at last we ceased jumping and swishbacking, we fell panting into three chairs, and, women-like, took stock of one another.

Sabina Ann Pipkin was laughing as it is given to few to laugh—a convulsed, silent sort of arrangement in sepulchral regions. She was facing the glass and the tooth was not.

Suddenly she stopped.

“My pivot!” she said. “Where is my pivot? O!”

“Don’t take it in the boat,” I said; “it will be sure to sink us. You will be forever searching for it. It will wreck us if you do, I’m certain.”

Where should I be without it?” said Sabrina Ann morosely. “Without it indeed!”

“Where you are now,” I said. “It’s quite true many matters hang on a pivot, but not boating matters.”

“My brother, the winner of the Wingfields, the Diamonds, the Colquhouns, will put us all up to a wrinkle,” said Selina excitedly. “He knows the Thames up and down – he and his trainer Joe.”

“Capital!” said I. “When shall we start, and what clothes shall we take?”

“I hope we shall have some adventures,” said Sabina Ann, sentimentally closing her eyes.

“I hope we have some good pulls,” said Selina feeling her arms reflectively.

“I hope we shan’t regret it,” said I pensively examining my nails.

“Regrets are lines without baits,” said Sabina Ann, awaking from her sentimental dreams. “Give our regrets to Tintoretto on our return.”

“Tintoretto will accompany us,” said I. “I go nowhere without Tintoretto.”

“Then I only hope it won’t rain,” said Selina, who I must say is always practical. “Fancy Tintoretto’s fur! that can’t be done up like my last year’s boa.”

“Which of us will do cox’n?” said Sabina Ann suddenly.

“Which is the smallest of the tree?”

"Which!" I said indignantly. "As if it required two thoughts. What delusions some of us have about our personal appearance!"

"O dear! how indignant we are!" said Sabina Ann. "Come let us measure; well-proportioned people are always on the slope."

"Very much on the slope," I said. "Some people are so well-proportioned that if they slope away altogether nobody would be any the wiser for their good proportions."

"My shoulders are like a sign-post," said Selina.

"The right goes bang away to Thames Ditton, the left to Marlow Lock."

"You must be stroke, of course," said Sabina Ann. "You are powerfully built. Phœbe and I are much of a build." I'm Phœbe.

"I deny the compliment, Sabina Ann," I said tartly. "I'm of the Highland build. You too, are at least half a head shorter than me."

"Measure," said Sabrina Ann, and he eyes challenged mine.

"By all means," said I stiffly. "Don't tumble over Tintoretto."

"I have lived at dancing academies," said Sabina Ann airily. "I tumble over nothing."

As she spoke she gave Tintoretto a violent kick, and with one hideous mew it sprang nearly up the chimney. Selina tried to coax it down, while Sabina Ann and I measures. Her head was, of course, tucked down in the nape of my neck, as I had foreseen.

"Sit forward, cox'n," said I; "and I'm bow, and she's stroke, and the champion of the Thames will coach us, and we will start from Mosely Lock next Wednesday, all being well; and we must take no luggage, or, at least as little as possible. A serge skirt is one thing, and a blouse of washing material – one off and one on. Straw hats, with the name of our boat, the Sirens; one pair of boots on and none off – one travelling-bag between us, in fact. Our

toothbrushes the only triple commodity needed that I can see. Then with regard to cooking utensils, let's take a saucepan and carry everything therein; a kettle, three plates, three mugs, and a knife, fork, and spoon apiece." "Who will do the housekeeping?" said Selina. "Who is the best manager?"

"How ridiculous you are, Selina," I said, "to talk of management under such circumstances as we propose!"

"How ridiculous to contemplate anything of the kind without it!" said Selina.

"I hate the word," I said crossly; "it means political economy."

"Now please don't be clever," said Sabina Ann.

"Let the cox'n house-keep – I mean boat-keep," I said.

"You must not be dainty, then, if I do it," said Sabina Ann. "I suppose the grocers will send the things after me that I order."

To this, somehow, there was no reply; Selina waived the question, and so did I.

"What shall we do if it rains?" said Sabina Ann. "We can't row in waterproofs."

"There, cox'n, you will have the advantage of us," said I; you can pull the strings very well in a waterproof if it should; but the 'forecast' says fine weather in September.

"Let us be nautical in our language," said Selina a little irritably. "Don't talk of 'pulling the strings'."

"Very well," I said, "it was a slip."

"My brother would have nothing to do with us if we talked like that." Said Selina.

"I doubt if he will as it is," I said, for I am easily depressed.

"Nonsense!" said Sabina Ann, who was plunging frantically about the carpet searching for her lost tooth; "he may be proud to coach such a crew."

"If pluck will be of service," said I, "in that I won't be lacking."

"Pluck is the distinguishing feature of the true English girl," said Selina; "I'm English to the backbone."

"O bother the backbone!" said I. "Don't get anatomical."

"Tintoretto must have her kennel," I said after a pause, "and her velvet cushion; she will be the one picturesque feature in the affair."

I saw that neither Selina nor Sabina Ann relished this, for both were silent.

"My goodness!" I said, "what about her milk? She won't touch tin-milk. She must lap water," I continued for I was determined to take her, and I saw that Sabina Ann and Selina were about to say "Leave her behind."

"The rough surface of a cat's tongue," said Selina (who was a bit of a quack,) "won't permit."

"Tintoretto is to come," I thundered.

"Won't take advice; just your style," said Sabina Ann.

"'Advice' should be called 'adverse,' " I said; "that's the way it always blows. Tintoretto and I are inseparable."

"I hope it won't be a case of 'In death they were not divided,' " said Selina glancing at Sabina Ann, who had thrown herself on the couch in an attitude expressive of contented expectation. "I hope we shan't all be drowned."

"Pah! Naught never was in danger," said she. "We are three old maids to a dead certainty, as far as I can see; and after that I've the worry of going down [rusticated] because of the Calendar."

"I know I won't be one," I said, Girton or no Girton."

CHAPTER II

WE TALK ABOUT IT AGAIN, AND THIS TIME ARE JOINED
BY THE CHAMPION OF THE THAMES AND THE CALENDAR.

I WAS DUSTING my room when, on the following day, Selina, Sabina Ann, the Champion, and the Calendar all burst in upon me.

No time to fly to the glass; if there was a smut on my nose, on my nose it must remain, though I knew it meant ruination to anybody listening to my talk under such circumstances, There was the case of Mrs Pontifex, the most elegant lady of my acquaintance,

discussing peacocks with a smut on the end of her nose, and wondering why her audience tittered, I flung the duster behind the sofa, and that malignant cat Tintoretto, of course, made for it, and rolled it up, and finally sat down in the middle of it.

“My brother, the Champion of the Thames,” said Selina proudly.

The Champion of that hoary old river, I thought; that grand and mighty river, the dear old Thames! Could there be a prouder title?

I don’t know why, but as I looked at him my imagination kindled. The glorious river seemed to rush past me. I could hear its strong deep voice, with the thousand echoes of its great past surging beneath. It spoke to me of the time when its cities were not, and its banks were all meadows studded with flowers. It spoke to me of times when the deep voice of the river spoke to the brain of Man, and said, “Build you cities to dwell in by my pleasant banks, and I will be to you both wisdom and health. Your ships shall sail outward on my glorious bosom, and your children shall learn from the ebb and flow of my tides lessons deep and true as Nature can teach them. I will reflect your days of sunshine and storm. I will mother you in gladness and in sorrow. *I*, the great river, by whose banks all the gladness, sadness—ay, and the madness—of life have been told out as monks tell their beads over and over again.”

I saw the great throngs at Henley behind him. I heard the shouts of the most athletic nation in the world, and, like the flash of an electric current, my thoughts widened and circled till I had left gay Henley far behind me, and had reached the stately river as it flows by glorious Westminster,

The eager life of the Parliaments; the deep note of the Abbey bells; all, all passed before me. I fell in love with the Champion then and there. The poor Calendar looked like an old frilled night-cap beside

this imperious beauty of athletic manhood—nay, I went further; I denominated him a poached egg and spinach. I gave myself up to quite an enthusiasm of admiration, and I said to myself, “If the Champion will love me, I’ll pull that boat round the world, and if he won’t love me I’ll be drowned in the rushing waters of a weir with the other two women in the boat.”

By-the-bye, I had better describe the Calendar, in case you meet him anywhere, and then I’ll describe the Champion, in case you meet *him* anywhere.

The Calendar has reached the dangerous land of forties. I say dangerous because a man at forty is as a jelly in a mould. You won’t shake his opinions at forty. They will tumble about later on when the mould gets too big for his opinions.

The great object which the Calendar seems to have set before him in the race of life is the cultivation of a beard. I used to admire beards, now they fill me with a curious frightened feeling. “The question,” said the late witty Lord Beaconsfield, “is whether we are apes or angels.” For my part I’m on the side of the angels. I too — but let us avoid these ebullitions of hair. This beard the Calendar is proud of buttoning into the middle button of his waistcoat, and then letting the flowing remainder fly from below the Waistcoat. This peculiarity marks him out at once, and you never get beyond a state of painful curiosity about that beard—wondering why he does this, and why his market for hair exceeds all other markets, and why he should button his beard into his waistcoat when there is no gale about.

Now I give you my word that the Calendar is painted from Nature, and is to be met in society any day.

Sabina Ann Pipkin met him at tennis a week ago, and she told me that he had pointed at a great tree which had fallen at the axe, and was lying prostrate, after the fashion of the trees at Hawarden, and that he had remarked:

"How jolly to sit on that fallen tree and propose to a lady, and then have one's dining-room furniture made out of the tree!"

Sabina Ann said, "But supposing you were refused?"

"Then," said he, "make a canoe out of it and paddle away to Australia.

Sabina Ann likes the Calendar, and would willingly have sat on that felled tree and been proposed to. I think she is taken with his quantity of hair having so little of her own. She has to scrape it with a hair-pin to make it fluff out over her forehead. She says she shall be a continuation of forehead fore and aft by-and-bye. I don't deny she may be, for it's getting serious with her hair-washes are all humbug.

Now let me describe the Champion. But beauty—real beauty—in man or woman—who can describe it? Well, well, the Champion is the direct descendant of the gay Charles II and the beautiful Eleanor Gwynne, and you can study the first in any gallery of our land, and the second at Hampton Court; and you can evolve exactly the remarkable personal charms which all who know him discover in the person of our Champion.

Selina looked at me after the introduction had taken place, and said:

"Good gracious, Phœbe! What is the matter with your eyes? Don't stare so."

"Stare! I said confusedly, "stare! We shall have to stare about pretty well when we are in the middle of the Thames and in the wash of those steamers."

"Well, let us keep our eyes for needed occasions," said Selina tartly, (I really do believe Selina is jealous. Liver again, I suppose.) "We must not forget to take our globules."

"Sit down," I said, "dear friends, all sit down."

"My dear Phœbe, we are not servants come to be hired," said Selina again. "Don't tell us to sit down!" (Liver again, O dear!)

The Champion had moved to the sofa, and suddenly I heard a wild yell. Tintoretto had sprung on his back. There she was, clawing and digging her sharp nails into the gay "blazer" round his splendid pillar throat. Some men's throats are exactly like turkeys plucked for Christmas. I have one in my mind's eye now. He was a gentleman who was always quoting Shakespeare, too, and talking about greatness, "Some men are born great"—and here the neck went a little—"some men achieve greatness"—here it ascended two inches higher—"and some have greatness thrust upon them," and here turkeys were nothing to it—nothing at all, I declare it. I flew for Tintoretto, and endeavoured to drag her off the Champion's back, At last I succeeded, and then she went for the chimney again.

"Pot her," said the Champion; "she's a brute!"

"Love me, love my cat," I said slyly,

Whereupon the Calendar got hold of the end of the beard at the end of his waistcoat, and began to examine it with microscopic attention, while Sabina, Ann got hold of the teapot and poured out tea recklessly. Selina turned colour as usual, but the Champion smiled right gallantly. "

"Have you got your boat?" said he, as we all settled down again.

"Yes!" we all said in chorus,

"Where did you get it?" said he. Is it waterproof? Have you the sliding-seats."

"We got it from Megson's, Richmond, It has a tarpaulin cover for night and wet weather, and all the appliances for towing, landing, or even dragging, supposing one of us goes overboard—Sabina Ann, for instance!" I exclaimed rashly, "after her 'pivot-'".

I paused. Sabina Ann was looking at me as I had never been looked at before,

"After her 'pivot?' " said the Calendar. "After her gib, you mean."

"Yes, the gib." I said feebly,

"When do you propose to start?" said the Champion. Shall I train you for a day or two, or do you propose to go right away?"

I looked at Selina, Selina looked at me, and Sabina Ann looked at Selina, while Tintoretto who had extricated itself from the chimney, stared again out of window with the air of "Don't look to me to settle knotty questions—if you get into boats get into the right ones, but if into the wrong, don't look to me, Tintoretto, to get you out of them."

It was Sabina Ann Pipkin who spoke.

"Speaking for myself, I should prefer to have a little coaching. My elbow action is, I believe, a little faulty, Speaking generally——."

Here I burst in.

"Coach us first by all means, M. le Wingfield-Colquhoun-Diamonds."

At this sally we all laughed.

The Champion, who, like all champions, is very modest, looked, as he always looks when excessively praised, too proud to take it,

"I shall judge if you are good form from the first," said he, "the moment the oar——",

"Strikes the water," I burst in.

"Never strike the water," said the Champion severely,

"The blade should only just be covered; running and sculling, like music, all depend on from where you take action."

"My back does most of my work," said Sabina Ann complacently, "it's so strong."

So round," I said, "you mean."

"A perfect back should possess curves," said Sabina Ann a little conceitedly, and glancing at the Calendar.

"Flat backs, are as ugly as flat-irons."

"I swing my own way," said Selina boisterously.

"The last bumping race I was in I pulled so strong that the boat kept going from side to side. We won at a canter."

"Good gracious!" said the Calendar.

He always says "Good gracious!" I think that's why I have the idea of a frilled night-cap. Women are the "good gracious" element, not men. The Champion understood my smile, for I saw him endeavouring to smother his laughter, and then he got up and put on his cover-coat, and we all followed him to the door, and watched him walk off with his two magnificent lady St. Bernards, Sappho and Nell.

I must tell you that we had appointed to meet at Sabina Ann Pipkin's residence in Richmond on the following Monday, and have one day's coaching before starting,

Sabina Ann lives with her rich old bachelor uncle and maiden aunt, and does much as she likes. She is a good all-round girl, and they know it, and having made up their minds that it is so, they never interfere with her selection of friends, or her frolics by land or river.

Happy Sabina Ann Pipkin! I believe they won't object to the bearded Calendar if he proposes; but I doubt it, for his heart is in his beard, and his mind in his brush and comb, by-the bye, I must not forget to take my sponge-bag, and a box of hair-pins, and sorted pins. Let me try to jog my memory by making a sort of rhyme.

Item —Sponge-bag, with flannel, soap, and a sponge; a toothbrush; don't forget hair-pins, crimped, straightened, and pronged; pins also, long and short whites; needles in cases like this; and cotton to swear black is white; string for our parcels, labels for our boxes; O, by-the-bye, we can't take boxes; a button hook, a thimble, scissors, a pencil-case, powder puff, hairwash for Sabina Ann; also night-gown case — must remember that. So very awkward, can't think of

anything more just now, but I am sure to later on. Sponge-bag of course – most important. O, I thought of that before. Tintoretto's basket and cat's meat—must remember that. Tintoretto is as fond of her own peculiar meat—which grows on “sticks” as a Bulgarian is of pork, I shall think of something else when I'm in bed; that's the moment for recovering the lost thought. You catch it tickling your brain just as you're going off, and wake with it dangling about in the early morning, waiting to catch you just as you rise to venture forth on another day's outing.

CHAPTER III

WE TAKE OUR PRELIMINARY SPIN UP STREAM

MR. AND MISS PIPKIN, of the Poplars, Richmond Hill, had received us all most kindly. They gave *carte blanche* to Selina and me to stay as long as we liked. “The friends of Sabina Ann are our friends,” said they. “What's good for one fish is good for another.” We laughed at this because we saw we were expected to; but I never could understand the allusion to fish. If they had said, “What's good for one Ribston is good for another Ribston,” then I should have been in it. By the bye, I wonder why they don't assume the double name, and call themselves the “Ribston-Pipkins.” I discovered afterwards that puns were an hereditary malady in the Pipkin family. Old Mr. Pipkin told me all about it, He said, “My mother made a pun one day when she was ninety. She made it on her birthday. She said she was a ‘ninety-pin.’” What on earth he meant I can't think. The only thing that's worthy of belief at the age of ninety is a well-attested will leaving all one's property out of the family. It's astonishing how the fortunate recipients will declare that the faculties, intellectual and moral, were in full

working order. That happened lately in the Calendar's family. He said he would employ Sir Charles Russell, and show up Nonconformity as it really exists when brought to bear on old ladies of ninety; but I suppose he is too much occupied with the beard to spring that mine.

Sabina Ann is devoted to her aunt. She says Miss Pipkin is so sympathetic! Loves a love affair—sees it all coming in the far distance. Has a wonderful eye, and is awfully clever. Could tell if a man is in earnest in a minute. She says love in earnest is always gloomy. When it is the other thing it's all hightly-tightly, flirty-flighty—no backbone.

Sabina Ann says when her aunt declares there is no backbone she looks something awful—just as if she saw a skeleton.

Sabina Ann is not quite sure whether or not her aunt entirely approves of this "three women in a boat" expedition. She said Miss Pipkin has a habit when not particularly well pleased of examining her nails. She will sit and look at them all turned up under her eyes for half-an-hour together when doubtful!

"No result follows as a rule, but if she is thoroughly upset about anything, Sabina says she has known her march up-stairs and fetch her incubator and hatch a chicken! Sabina says millions couldn't pay for the happiness that the inventor of the "incubator" has brought into the Pipkin family.

"She says nobody knows the full meaning of that glance at the nails, followed by the walk up-stairs, before the arrival of the "incubator" patent but herself.

This is very possible. We have a description of fine scent about each other's tempers more undeviating than Tintoretto's nose after a mouse. The: Champion and the Calendar: were invited by the Pipkins to join us at luncheon and after this we were to have a

preliminary spin on the river for the Champion to see what sort of form we were in.

Old Mr. Pipkin is fearful at meals, Meal is the only word to apply to his proceedings. He gets the table-napkin under his chin and makes such a front of it that it's worse than a Bishop's apron. Then he measures the dishes with an eye which knows love only in this form. O, it's terrible! He can't bear you to speak, except to the dish, and over these he murmurs incantations, which take the form of blessing and cursing.

There was a curry, among other things. He did give it the cook over that curry. "Hot! hot! hot! Curry her! Curry her! A woman with a temper for condiments like that ought to be burnt outside, instead of being permitted to burn our insides!"

Mr. Pipkin's nose upsets me completely. It looks as if the scent of every dish from Esau's "mess of pottage" onward has ascended beneath its ancestral curvatures. His nose looks on such capital terms with his ventricles of digestion, the two seem to play into each other's hands.

So different to many noses! Most folks have such disgusted noses! Outraged noses! With the air of pollution! political! social! moral! and culinary!

Sabina Ann looks very subdued when at the ancestral board. She won't look like that going down stream.

She says eating, taken seriously, affects her like mathematics; it's like calculating on the strength or tad weakness of one's digestion;

Selina, on the other hand, calls it the higher education of the ventricles of digestion.

She says Mr. Pipkin is wonderful that way, and would come out Senior Wrangler of the higher education of the membranous receptacle.

Miss Pipkin looks as if she enjoys every of life except the feeding.

She looks disgusted at the poor dead things which give us life—or, rather, keep us alive—but She does not say so. Her lips have an air of “lock and key” now and then. By the bye, the idea of starting from Molesey Lock has been abandoned. We start from Richmond Bridge. The Pipkins say they want to see us off, and that’s the only way they can manage it, as Miss Pipkin will be busy with the “incubator” to-morrow, and Mr Pipkin has a new “curry” coming out. When, at last, luncheon was over—the signal being the solemn removal of Mr. Pipkin’s gouty left leg on to a footstool of special proportion and peculiar make—we three women rushed to put on our hats and fall into march.

I saw the Champion glance at us much as a commanding officer looks at his recruits; and I saw that he was thoroughly amazed with the adiposity of Sabina Ann’s figure, or figure, as I heard an ultra-particular lady pronounce it.

“Ah,” I thought exultantly—“ah, he will make her do her five miles before breakfast before he gives her a place after all.” To my surprise the Champion, however, said nothing.

When we arrived at the landing-stage he merely told us to get into our boat, which was awaiting us with a great tawny-skinned boatman (Jack Britton), a well-known riverman, standing in the middle of it, with his boat-hook making fast. We purpose to be away from Monday till Saturday. I don’t know precisely how long Mr. Jerome’s three men were away, but we don’t want to outrival them altogether. No; only want to show that three women are equal to three men in the boating line, and a deal better in the cooking, which is an old hereditary capacity of the sex.

“Get in, Selina; get in, Sabina Ann,” I said airily; I follow;” and follow I did, tripping aver Sabina’s serge skirt, and tearing it nearly off her back. Sabina only

smiled. But O, that smile! It will haunt me "Her sweet smile haunts me yet"

"Where will the pots and pans go?" said Selina.

"And my portmanteau!" said Sabina Ann. "I shall want needle and thread if clumsiness and awkwardness are to prevail."

"Where will Tintoretto sit?" I said meekly; for really it is a dreadful feeling to tread on a toe or a skirt.

"With the other cats," said a melodious whisper from somewhere.

I glanced at the waving tree tops. Ah, life was glad enough! After that I felt quite equal to commanding the rudder-lines and musing pensively on torn skirts, divided skirts, and skirting by the river's edge.

"Now," said the Champion, "I shall bid you three ladies 'farewell. I commit you into the hands of Jack Britton. These words before I go: Keep under the bank, sit up, and don't bucket."

Is there anything else I have to tell them?" I said, at once taking my position as cox, and assuming the authority of coach.

"Keep your stroke long and light, turn your wrists under, and get your hands away sharp; avoid racing, and 'see that ye fall not out by the way.'"

"Now we are off! Good-bye, Champion! Thanks for your 'tips' Forward! Row!"

It was flood-tide and the good boat sped at the strong stroke of our robust scullers.

Sabina occupies the stroke thwart, Selina is bow.

I must say I feel proud as we sweep along on the top of the tide, and take our preliminary canter. The Champion is gazing after us, well pleased.

His lips seem to form the words "Women can scull!"

Jack Britton is running along the tow-path. His red handkerchief knotted around his neck (in which the veins stand out like the sinews of an oak) makes a bright bit of colour against the vivid blue of the sky. The white dancing light, which fills the air with a

strange translucent haze, gathers about him as he runs and shouts, and shouts and runs.

In the full force of her new vigour bow begins to get ahead of stroke; her sculls are literally leaping in and in and out. Suddenly the handles of her sculls go bang into Sabina's broad back, and there punish her; but, wonderful to say, Sabina pays no heed. On she goes, as if impervious to pain.

Enthusiasm knows no pain. On past Pope's Villa; on past stately houses rising dream-like from the banks! On, on, on! as if the strong, sweet current, which flows away from the heart of the mighty river had leapt into their hearts and made their pulses beat with its own strength, their pulses pulse with its own pulse,

Teddington Weir is reached. Here we take breath; the waters swirl about us.

The tumult of the weir tumbles about our ears and makes our voices sound like an echo.

"Where is Jack Britton?" says stroke, who is not "winded" in the least.

"Where, indeed?" said I. "Who can run with us?"

"Who can tell us something we don't know in sculling?" I continued. "Sabina Ann, I congratulate you! Selina, I embrace you! Get away downstream! I'm ready to start on Monday, and to be cox for the World's Championship."

CHAPTER IV

WE GET AWAY UP STREAM

THEY ALL STOOD on Richmond Bridge at midday on that particular Monday, on the hottest of our often hot September days, to see us off. Mr. Pipkin's gouty left leg was the last thing I saw; it was hanging between the rails somewhere. It's a conspicuous

feature always. Sometimes I think he is proud of having the gout. It's a kind of passport to ancestry; there is lineage in gout. The Calendar's beard had escaped from the middle button, and was flying like a kite in the breeze. Miss Pipkin was looking nervously at it. She confessed to Sabina Ann that he reminded her of the king in the Old Testament whose hair grew, as well as his nails, out of all conscience; and that she thought there must be something sinful about the Calendar, and she hoped her niece would not look at him from that point. She had added oracularly, "from that point."

"From the point of the beard, I suppose?" Sabina had rejoined. Whereupon Miss Pipkin, being annoyed, had retired with the incubator.

The Champion hates cats, and I thought it particularly sweet of him to carry Tintoretto for me, and place her with his own hands on her gorgeous cushion next me.

"She spits," said Sabina Ann. "Take care, Monsieur Wingfields."

"It would be an honour to be spat upon by Tintoretto," said the Champion gallantly.

"Is that portmanteau fixed up?" said Selina." "And where is the kettle and all the rest of it?"

"Tintoretto will take care of the kettle? I said complacently; that's in her line, I believe everything is here. Now away! Away! Away!"

We were off in good earnest. Richmond Bridge is receding from view. Already, in the rich noonday sun it is poetised into some old-world bridge, from whose parapets a race of men and women, with young hearts and enthusiastic brains, look out on great expanse of waters, and dream of order, law, and government as it should be, with senators vested in wisdom and graced with the safest of all political weapons – heart.

The meadows to the left are starred with ox-eye daisies, which have lingered long this year, as if loth to go; the long grasses sigh aloud, and nod upwards at the blinding sun; late butterflies flit happily and yet uncertainly from leaf to blade—sweet butterflies, which year by year become rarer and rarer, as the cruel pin of the collector pierces their fragile bodies, and they take their place in Mr. So-and-so's collection. The air, with the scent of the river and the meadows, fans one's spirits into gay accord with all that this dear glad Nature would teach us to-day of rest and happiness.

Care is not for us.

Let care crack grim jokes with whom it will to-day,
For us the secret of the river, the secret of the stars,
the secret of the sun, is to be unfolded!

We have got clear away from conventionalities burdensome trappings which harness us in our every-day surroundings. We are water-nymphs, we are Undines, we are creatures in flesh, blood, and spirit; but for one week we will just float out on these glad waters and take the atmosphere of Nature, pure Nature, as our guide to the temples of pleasure.

"Phœbe! Phœbe! Phœbe!

How I do detest my Christian name! I'm sure it's more fitted to be a heathen's. If ever I have children, won't I give them pretty names, and knock all that silly nonsense about calling Mary Ann after grandma on the head!

What's in a name, indeed? Why, mind's in it. Use your ancestry as your intellectual guide-book. Study its names, its virtues, its follies, for the express purpose of forming your own code of action, and study it for no other purpose.

You may just as well adopt grandma's ideas on education as grandma's Christian name. Phœbe! Am I like a Phœbe? Is there a single feeble line about me? Fancy if the Champion proposes to me— "Phœbe you

love me?" What's the use of vowing about the strength of my devotion when I'm only Phœbe?

"Phœbe!" (this time Selina is in agonies.) "Don't you see what's coming? There! I told you so."

Bump, bump, bump! The nose of our boat is buried in the stern of an ancient tub manned by the most eccentric-looking crew I ever saw. At the prow sat an old gentleman in swallow-tails and white tie and parson's crush-hat. By his side a lady bedizened as if for a masquerade, It wasn't so much her dress that arrested me—though in all conscience that was queer enough, with its epauletted shoulders, and wisp of straw, with a rosebud, for a bonnet—as it was her face. O heavens! how our faces betray us! Do what we will with the slow mask called Time, its sardonic leer at all vanity is a thing best to bow to.

This madam had fought Time not with weapons intellectual or spiritual, but with cosmetics and unguents—Pandora's box, with a lie at the bottom—and Time had regarded her with that strange hard awful look with which it drives its furious car.

She was very angry with us—very angry indeed. Your name!" she exclaimed angrily—"If names you have. In my day there were but some dozen names we thought worth knowing, but nowadays everything has a name."

"Ah, madam," I said, "in these days not only has everything a name, but everything has a voice. Voices which can hardly articulate yet for lack of the grace of education; voices which are clamorous and mow more like idiots than like men. I speak of the voices of the numbers. We are only 'three things' in a boat. We are rejoicing in the liberty of incognitas at present. Dare we ask for your name? We grow apologetic and deferential in the society of our superiors. We have our apologetic politicians, our apologetic preachers, and our apologetic lady-scullers.

“My name!” she said, “my name! Row On, my good men, and get us safe to land, if you can, and keep well away for the future from this new river nuisance, this horrid development of—of—of——”

“Healthy womanhood,” I said cheerfully. “Pull away, bow.”

We are unlocked, and off again with a long, slow, sweeping measure, which sets us all singing; and this is the song we sang, our voices blending in perfect rhythm with the stroke of the oars, and my body keeping perfect time as I swing:

“Fair as the morning, gay as the day,
Floats our glad bark as we sing our lay,
Joy at the helm, bliss at the prow,
Three women afloat in a boat, Yo-ho!

“We are glad with the joy of a new day's birth,
We are free with the freedom of woman's worth,
We are strong with the strength of the river's breath
Three women afloat in a boat, Yo-ho!

“The stars come out as the sun goes in,
The day's toil ends as the night begins,
The glowworm's lamp is our light to fame,
Three women afloat in a boat, Yo-ho!

“The kingdom of women has yet to cone,
The race for wealth is not half begun;
In the heart of a man there is room for all,
Three women afloat in a boat, Yo-ho!

“Yo-ho! (*Echo*) Yo-ho!
“Yo-hoy! (*Echo*) Yo-hoy!

We sing. Well, there is no doubt about it! Selina has a profound bass! Hers is a man's voice—it never was meant to be a woman's! Her “Yo-ho!” and “Yo-hoy!” is quite equal to Signor Foli's! Some men fall in love with

a woman's voice, some with a foot, some with a face, some with a mind, some with nothing in particular but with the indiscriminate whole. Selina's bass voice will have to be fallen in love with. Down will her lover go into the depths of those great vocal organs, and there will remain captive. "Yo-ho! Yo-hoy!"

Sabina Ann has a small, even a silly, voice! It angers me. She sings at penny readings. One song of hers is all about "muscles"—she calls them moscles—moscles!—and does look so perfectly idiotic, even our curate gave way and giggled last time she sang about those disgusting muscles!

I never liked him so well—a touch of nature! O dear! there's so much human nature about, that a touch of nature, as our poets call it, does one good.

Still, Sabina's voice, well watered by the river Thames, is not so bad: it gains a touch of poetry and partakes of the spirit of an echo.

Now about my voice. My brother, who can't sing a bit, says he is the only member of our family who can sing. Strange infatuation! Now I have the family voice. There was an old gentleman standing on the bank fishing as our boat flashed past. He was fishing, with his mouth open—attractive to the fish, I suppose. My goodness I thought he never would stop opening it as he listened to the song of three women. I thought we had hypnotised him. The rod fell from his hand, and the fish, I conclude, got away but he never noticed. There he stood.

O, to sketch him!

"Do it Again!" at last he shouted, "Do it again! Bravo, ladies! Bravissimo, ladies, or mermaids, or whatever you are! Do it again!"

"Not if we know it," said Selina (*sotto voce*.) We close our song and hope you will close your mouth. What a digestion that old gentleman will get in time," she continued, "if he goes on like that! He will become the favourite resting-place of all the gnats in creation."

“Don’t talk about it,” said Sabina, “Anything of that sort makes me feel so faint. Let’s hook on and have some tea,”

Now anybody who knows anything about the river knows that to hook on is not always easy. Selina, who is a judge, says it’s more difficult to hook on to a bank than even a young man. That, of course, may be Selina’s experience, I am not prepared to dispute matters of the heart with anybody. There are ladies who can “hook on” up to eighty. Society will bear me witness to this fact.

Some ladies learn the art late in life, and there is very little chance for the poor men when they take to it, with experience making up for all other deficiencies. Arm youth with experience, youth would be invincible; but youth, like raw sugar, is apt to cloy. To take life gracefully, and to manage it easily, is high are indeed.

Some people make an awful mess of it, as a moment’s observation can tell us; that war with Fate, Destiny, or one’s lot is one too many for them.

“Hook on, Phœbe! Hook on, Phœbe! I won’t row another stroke!”

Sabina has flung her arms above her head, and her sculls rest idly in the river. Selina has thrown her straw hat on the opposite seat, and is shaking down her pigtails. Selina’s hair is grand, I intend to have a bit of fun with it—tie a crab on to each tail! Play monkey tricks for once in a way, and no apologies. “There is no having a bit of fun nowadays,” said a lady, “without apologising for it.”

We hear of bishops playing with kittens. Why shouldn’t we lay folk play with crabs? I’ll be on those crabs before our river expedition is over.

My hook at last fixed the bank, and we moor our boat just under that lovely little island above Thames Ditton. The scene is one of fairyland. The September sun is on the wane, but before he goes he flames out

like some great jovial god in whom all the gladness and love of life is gathered. He fires his glances into the deep depths of the giant trees, and makes them crimson. He flings his arrows of radiant light across the river, and turns it into a sea of molten gold. The swan's whiteness is purified into the similitude of angels' raiment. The homely touch of a kettle hanging, gipsy-fashion, in its quaint little tripod arrangement is just that link of earth with heaven which makes the divinity and humanity of life. We were about to gather round and enjoy rest after labour, when a yell in which all the nightmares of creation's ages seemed to have gathered made us start to our feet.

CHAPTER V

RIVER MEN, WOMEN, AND THINGS

"DON'T LET US WITNESS it," said Sabina Ann. Somebody has evidently thrown themselves into the river, and if we don't take care we shall have the disagreeable task of appearing as witnesses. Let us get out of the way." Revelations in character! I looked at Sabina Ann. After all, there is a good deal of green cheese about me (Phœbe.) I had thought Sabina Ann one of the most unselfish of girls.

"Get up in the tree, Sabina Ann," I said severely, and sit there and see your brothers and sisters drown before your eyes. The shade of the trees will cover you; the light of the sun will blind you. Get up in your tree! You are not the first, or the last, who 'has beaten a like retreat when their pockets, or their courage, or their ease was likely to be invaded. "Run! mount! hide!

"Get the life-buoy from the boat," said Selina "Get the rope! get the air-cushion"

Selina was running, and screaming this out as she ran. Selina is always as quick as lightning. I followed as fast as I could, while Sabina remained by the kettle. I turned as I fled to regard her. She was watching the smoke ascend from its sprout, quite reflectively and comfortably. I believe I heard her say, "The world is full of screams. I shall only listen to my own. Sing on, kettle and give me a good cup of tea." By the time I had reached Selina, I found her in full altercation with a stout lady, who, accompanied by her son, had moored her boat a few yards from ours, and I soon discovered that she was the author of those frightful screams.

"Your horrid cat," she was saying to Selina, "has stolen my potted ham—devoured every bit of it! I believe it's possessed, for when I took my umbrella to chase it away, it just got itself up in a ball and looked at me, ready to spring, ready to bite—ready for anything. Imagine the strength of it, after eating all that potted ham. Wretch!"

"I'm glad it's nothing more serious," said Selina. Your screams were so dreadful I thought at least you were drowning, May you never scream for anything more serious than the loss of your potted ham, for which I hope you will permit me to—to—" (Selina's hand was in her pocket; she was bending forward quite gracefully.)

"Permit me to interfere," said "the son, "My mother [here he examined his knickerbockered leg] has [he smiled faintly]—has [he blushed to the roots of his hair] has—condescended to be desperately upset about the potted meat; it is a pity [here he again examined his hose, and speculated about the knickerbocker] It is the way of ladies, it is the habit of the sex. Trifles occupy them, potted ham convulses them. Screams, alas! are not yet potted down. Let me [here he raised his hat a quarter of an inch] reassure you, on the part of my-mother, whose nerves are like

bells gone wrong or yet unhung, there is no reason for the [here he delved in pocket and brought out a very elaborately carved and elegantly wrought card-case] scare—or shall I say reason in it. Potted ham, whether devoured by cats of the genus fur or the genus feminine, will multiply. Everything multiplies.” He raised his hat an inch further, and drew out a card, examined it critically as if to identify himself with his card, and handed it to Selina, who waved it away deprecatingly, yet always charmingly, Selina is always well-bred. There are heads you can’t upset; hers is one.

“Ah!” said Knickerbocker (we never knew his name) “Ah, I see; I understand! The fence of perfectly well-bred Englishwoman is a fence stout enough to guard her from all adventurous introductions. The river Thames is sufficient chaperon for such a one.” He raised his hat altogether, and we felt ourselves bowed away. I gave Selina a nudge—I couldn’t help it—as we walked off.

“My dear,” I said, “he has cooked his sausage at the ‘school,’ and she—she has saved her pence to send him there and be potted down in the end by him into the apology for motherhood at which he appraises her.”

“Well,” said Sabina Ann, as we drew near, “who was wise after all, you or I? I’ve had my tea; now have yours, I’m not easily scared. I knew it was nothing. I’ve had all the bother of making the tea, and warming the game-pie (yes, I’ve heated it), and now I suppose you are both going to turn on me and call me a sneak and a coward! I’ve more worldly wisdom in my little finger than you two have in your whole bodies. Never interfere in other people’s affairs. Attend to your own banking-book in life, and on no pretext whatever get embroiled in anybody else’s. I know a gentleman at this moment who has a female canary bird, which he says is without a mate, and eating its head off at his

expense. I refused it. Why should I bother myself with his mateless female canary with its enormous appetite? I knew better. Wait, and remember you needn't be old to know life; that's the frightful error which has caused, and is causing such false policy in Church and State—decrepitude holding the keys nearly everywhere. In these days the young have learnt life. The young know it, and the young can rule, and reign, and administrate."

"O, game enough!" I said. "This is a capital pie; but if you think your sophistries, Sabina Ann, "blind me for one moment, you are mistaken. I know you now, with your tree shelter."

"I'm glad you do," said Sabina Ann. "Let's all have another cup of tea, and then let us embark. We must pull on to Sunbury."

"Somehow we are all quite silent as we float off again. A mellow soft light is on the river, and aflerglow on tree and sky. We reflect the mood of Nature. We are in deepest sympathy with her. She belongs to all, but she owns the few. To these she absolutely gives herself; to these she unfolds the secret of her passionate workings in the ebb and flow of tides, and light and shadow, and life and death (if death she knows; for who can call it death when it is but to produce a more abundant life that the leaf falls and the day dies?)

Kingfishers are skimming and dipping their beaks in the swift-flowing current. The kingfishers are the children of the stars, I think, they are such brilliant birds; and the larks are the songs that the stars have embodied, and the nightingales are the dreams that the stars have forgotten.

"I'm thinking, about lodgings," said Selina suddenly. "Lodgings are like a heavy cake to a delicate digestion. I never could digest lodgings. There is the bed, and there is the carpet; there is the table-cloth

and the cutlery, and the maid-servant's hands, and the landlady's cap. Glance, and welcome."

"What's the use of going on like that?" said Sabina. "I thought you had more stuffing, Selina."

"I'm a goose without stuffing, I suppose," said Selina, but, O dear, if you see me go stuffing round that bed, don't laugh, please don't laugh!"

"You are hideously economical, you two people" said Sabina, who inherits all her aunts' and uncle's combined fortunes, and can afford to bounce a bit.

"Why not go to hotels?"

"Certainly not," I said. Selina and I are too wise for that, Fancy the hall porter rushing at that minnow of a portmanteau there and saying, 'What's to follow?' Fancy the bill with which the clerk at the desk would bait three Innocents Abroad, and fancy venturing to go to hotels with any other idea in your head than one of ardent desire to help the limited company into that state of comfort, luxury, and ease, to which every one of the directors is most justly entitled! Besides, my dear Sabina Ann, Selina and I have no Ribston Pipkins in our market. The roseate apple of concord is for you. Celery, spelt sellery, is for us, Selina and I share the fate of the Calendar. Our mines blew up and our shares were kites."

"There are moments," said Sabina Ann sentimentally, closing her eyes, which always gives a lovesick: look, "when I wish I was poor, I shall be married for my money, I know it. I shall never feel quite sure that in this whole wide, wide world there is one—yes, one! - who values me at my true worth, and looks beyond the dollar to the——"

"Crab!" I screamed, for, no mistake about it, Sabina Ann caught one now. Over she went! Her heels - I saw them last in the new moon. Blown up in the new moon she was. Her hat - that went gaily skittling up steam, a swan after it, with an eye to millinery, I suppose. Her hair - well we won't say much about it,

but I am more convinced than ever that hair as a natural shrubbery waving about a face is very charming. The light beat down on Sabina Ann's crown – the kind, and alas! The cruel light.

It was all very trying indeed, and what made it worse was Selina's *sangfroid*. She pulled on quite calmly. She paid no more attention to Sabina's heels than the eels in the river. She even began to sing, which I confess was exasperating. To hear anybody singing when one is being made to look a fool is enough to exasperate the temper of even an Archbishop.

I remember once long ago being caught in a river mist just up above Marlow. There were three of us in that boat, and one of us was a little Irishman just back from Cambridge. We were in the hands of a novice, his sister and I; and, I remember, as the great white mist thickened and coiled and wound itself about us, I felt a great fear come over me, for day had met night. And night had welcomed day, and no sun yet, and on that now dreadful river. At this juncture Charlotte (yes, her name was Charlotte) lifted up her voice and sang some Scotch ditty. (Nothing so melancholy as a Scotch ditty in a mist.) "O," I said, "stop; nothing short of the Scots Guards' band would put courage into me. Keep the Scotch ditty for papa after dinner, when his ducks are all swans, and for goodness' sake, if we are to go down, let us go down in silence." "The swan thinks your hat a loaf of bread," said Selina presently. "Clever of it. Straw is related to wheat, and wheat is related to bread, and bread is a great favourite with swans."

Selina's oar went out and caught the hat, and she handed it complacently to Sabina, who said feebly; "I shall feel better now when I've got a covering. There is so much protection in a hat."

She absolutely began to close her eyelids in that disgusting sentimental way again over

Her rather fine eyes. (Fine black eyes, she calls them.)

It's extraordinary the effect that poetry garbled as coming man has on the imagination of a girl who, like Sabina, awakes rather late in life to some idea of taking matters of the heart united to the "ring" in hand. Sabina Ann, who is really endowed with an unusual amount of acumen on all subjects outside the pale of love, becomes, directly she touches it, completely limp and like a young lady's diary hidden away in her drawer with a fadeless rose and a shrivelled spray of maidenhair bound together with a fine wire thread, and pierced through and through with the darts of outrageous fortune.

CHAPTER VI

LADIES AND GREEK ODES

WE LEFT OUR BOAT in charge of an antediluvian old boatman, who owned a boat-shed by the pleasant banks of Sunbury. He was a countryman of some sort. We didn't go into the climate of his accent. Everything was "terrible funny" with him, and he was "properly glad to see ladies manning a boat! He didn't see "why womenfolk shouldn't row a boat as well as menfolk. Why there's plenty on 'em as can do as good a day's work, and better, than some of these coves as calls themselves working men. "They will pipe to you", said he, "yes, they'll pipe to you, and there it ends—all smoke. What's the difference in a day's work between a man and a woman? Just the same as 'twixt the price of bloaters and herrings. Come to ask the price of bloaters, 2*d.* a pair; come to ask the price of herrings, 1*d.* each, come to ask which is the most tasty like, why, six of one, half-a-dozen of t'other. Selina was awfully pleased with the herring-bone compliment. Sabina Ann, on the contrary, said she was disgusted; and to be apologised for by an old boatman was significant of women's true position!

"Directly people begin to apologise," she said, "you know where you are."

I let Selina and Sabina argue the matter out. There are moments when, if speech is eloquent, silence is golden. I wanted to keep in with them both, and if anybody has ever attempted that sort of thing walking between two ladies differing, they will understand the extreme awkwardness of the position. If I sided with Selina, Sabina would cut me, and if I sided with Sabina, Selina would eat me. I pretended to be deeply occupied with the search for apartments, and to be the practical element among visionaries.

"Speak: up, Phœbe," said cone suddenly, "you shan't be a neutral."

"There are the apartments I dreamt about last night," I said' warily. "The landlady in my dream wore spectacles, and had seen what she called the 'ups and downs.'"

"Avoid those sort of people, whether in dreams or out of them," said Sabina. "The lute of 'Ups and Downs' is legion. We shall have to hear all about the family mansion that was, and the pedigreed skeletons, and the naughty, naughty husband who drove 'em all mad."

Our steps had lead us away from Sunbury proper to a little off-street approached by a lane, a sort of "lovely" looking spot, where yokels doubtless court after their own peculiar fashion—a fashion which is decidedly more eloquent of silent rapture 'than aught else. Speak they never do; they "keep: company," whatever that is. Not much company about it, apparently. Whatever lessons sweet Mother Earth has taught our yokels, she has not taught them to rise above the lowing of the ox, or the braying of the ass, or the grunting of the pig; for certain am I, did the animal world take to talk, they would talk each after its own kind; and if the peacock "tweeied" like a

duke, the pig would grunt like our Sam Paine, who lives "up street," as our village is called.

"Sam will you come to church on Sunday, and say your prayers, and hear our vicar preach?

"Yew, you, yer!"

"Remember, Sam, time is passing, and Sundays come and go, and come more quickly than they go."

"Yer, you, yer!" (New departure.)

"What a capital dog that is of yours after the sheep!" (Patting the dog.)

"Yer, you, yer!"

"Well, Sam, we shall see you in church. We shall look out for you." » (Yes, verily.)

"Yer, you, yer!" (And he's got a vote, and I haven't.)

Ah, me! will there be a special paradise for folks with a conscience without education, and for folks with education and no conscience?

"That's a haunted house," said Sabina Ann, who is supposed to be more susceptible to medium and hypnotic suggestions than, either Selina or me.

We had stopped before a long, low-looking house at the end of a "lovely" lane. A huge board with "Apartments" was stuck conspicuously among the laurels, which edged it round with a gleaming aureole peculiar to laurels.

"Rubbish!" said Selina.

The amount of ease which unimaginative folks toss off that word "Rubbish!" has often struck me. "Rubbish!" It's a queer old cart-load, "full up" with everything imaginary, from an imaginary polypus in the nose to a ghost which a hen has "laid" at your door.

"It's an unknown quantity," said the mathematical Sabina, whether, if we once get in there, we shall ever give that old boat of ours (now resting peacefully in that boat-shed over there) the 'long pull' the 'strong pull' and the 'all together pull' which is to bring us victoriously back to Richmond Bridge, where, let us

hope, we shall find Aunt and Uncle Pipkin awaiting us; and others too," she added dreamily, then, yet more dreamily, "others too!"

Selina and I left her standing in the porch with her "others." Selina rang the bell briskly, and I took a preliminary rush round the garden with Tintoretto on my shoulder. I always like to see the back of a house, for this reason—if the back is all right, be sure the front is superlatively all right. The backs of anything, from a house to a life, are the best introductions to the front rooms.

Selina rang three times before we had an answer. At last a very stout, ringleted woman with a black satin gown (why do landladies always go for black satin?) and a cap decorated with wallflowers and long grasses, on which spangled insects danced the dance of selection of the fittest, appeared. She gave us the in-and-out stare of the appraiser, and her right eye, which was entirely out of accord with the left, glanced scorn at Tintoretto, who was still on my shoulder.

"What rooms have you?" said Selina.

Now. Selina's manner will carry her anywhere. She can assume the air of a Lord Chief Justice in petticoats and she can look as completely mistress of the situation as a big knowledge of life can alone give you. She has that peculiar form of knowledge which has been wittily enough called saving knowledge.

Selina knows not only how to butter her bread, but how to butter it with the best of butter, got just 1*d.* a pound less than anybody else. She knows absolutely the best cut off a sheep or a bullock. She can inform the butcher. Whew! I am amazed at her. It's intuitive; it must be intuitive, because I'm certain she has never been in a slaughter-house. The butchers respect Selina; she is in the know.

"Show us your rooms," said Selina with just the *souçon* of a brush past that black satin, the ringlets, and the cap.

The landlady shrank up and dwindled down into her most communicative and amiable self. She dropped a profound curtsy, and said: "This way, ladies."

"I must have a bedroom facing south," said Selina.

"Mr. Christian, the architect, says we live just ten years longer if we select rooms facing south and build houses facing south. I can't sleep unless I face south. From Southdown mutton to a south aspect, I'm purely on the side of the south."

"Just what "the Hereditary Grand Dook said. His Hereditary Highness is now in occupation of the best bedroom. His Hereditary is here for quiet; he is writing-a book." a

"Ah!" said Selina, "Well, what other rooms have you? The Greek gentleman has just gone; he had the bedroom and sitting-room which faces south-west, and there's the little dressing-room off, which his valet had."

"Tintoretto and I will do very well there," I said eagerly; for if there is a thing I hate it's sharing the nocturnal peculiarities of Selina or Sabina. Sleep a wink you can't. There are nightmares, there are dreamers there are sleep-walkers, there are snorers, there are the folks who tow the counterpanes off, and rush the eider-down quilts away, and there are the folks who heap blankets on, and pack and tuck themselves up as if complete oblivion has set in with unconditional surrender all round.

Selina again said:

"Show us the rooms," and in single file we followed the landlady up two flights of stairs.

"This is the room just vacated by the Greek gentleman," said Mrs. Harbottle; for that was her name.

I looked at Selina, Selina looked at Sabina, and Sabina looked at me, while Tintoretto jumped off my shoulder and went into the corner by the dressing-table, and watched some invisible smell; for I

conclude the scent of a mouse to a cat is as the scent of a rose to us.

O that Greek gentleman!

Cedars of Lebanon and spices of Parnassus, it was nutmeg with a vengeance!

Sabina began to "shake"; as for Selina, she stood over the bed frowning and sniffing (it's no use mincing matters when writing the absolute truth about things, as I am.) She got her brows together in one deep enforced line, and she seemed to me to tower over some invisible Greek gentleman and blow him into the Archipelago.

"He was the most, highly suggestive creation," she said at last, "that ever set up the standard, of fragrance in human spices or blown from coral reefs. He has left an undying memory behind him. For the sake of Greeks and ancient Medes in general, we must do our little best to get rid of him. Good madam, your rooms are haunted! No, no, don't look alarmed – I mean by haunted nothing more serious than the 'odes' of Greece. Let us through wide the windows and get the nodding lime-trees out there in the garden to nod in here. Let" (here she paused and meditatively examined the counterpane, put up her upper lip, and drew down under her lip in a fashion peculiar to herself) — "let us forget Greek and Latin, and thank God we are Saxons, lovers of soap-and-water, and ardent admirers of the Order of the Bath!" "Hot water at seven-thirty every morning said Mrs Harbottle, who only caught the concluding sentence. "Hot and cold laid on. His Hereditary Highness is most comfortable.

"We are boating women," said Selina, "as I daresay you have concluded from our appearance. We only require rooms till tomorrow; we hope to be off soon after sunrise."

"Is your boat here" said Mrs, Harbottle, excitedly "I'm sure it will be quite an honour to have put up three

ladies rowing themselves like three men! I must tell his Hereditary Highness about this. He thinks a deal of our English ladies. He says German ladies are comprised of two classes—cooks and princesses; and he says he doesn't know which takes his fancy most," "Have you given him an hereditary grand sausage for breakfast?" said I. "He couldn't write on anything better than that—I think you said he was an author?" "Most pleasant gentleman to do for," said the landlady; "but I always have pleasant people here. Don't know how it is."

After this we felt we must enroll ourselves smug pleasant people. If there exists a person on earth who should be as cheese to mice 'tis a landlady to her patrons. She has to trap them and devour them, and reset her trap day by day. She has to learn human nature from A. to Z, and smile the eternal smile of welcome at the lean purse of A who pays better than the fat purse of Z. who respects his banking account too much because it is heavy to use it liberally, while A. respects his too little because it is light to use it meanly. Motive rolls remorselessly on, and plays sad havoc with our good and evil. Sometimes I think Motive must have the smile of a cynic.

Sabina Ann proposed a moonlight stroll, and Selina and I were in no mood to dispute the wishes of Sabina; so, after that dreadful meal called a high tea—"low tea" I should call it; it always makes me ill, It's not its rusticity, for I admire rusticity; it's an atmosphere about high tea I never could stand. The cutlets look so flat at the teapot, and the teapot looks so disgusted at the cutlets, and the hostess looks so completely out of it all round, and the general company so completely bewildered between sweets and meats and forks and spoons and knives galore, that it's enough to make anybody' go off in a cunningly devised hypnotic swoon, so as to be removed from the scene of that daring attempt at a

compromise with your neighbour's stomach, high tea -we went out.

Selina was for just taking a peep-at the boat to see it was all right. She talked of it as if it were a baby in a cradle. She hoped the old man would look after it. Was it under the shed? Were the cushions turned over? Then she kept on about the apparatus for holding the kettle. Was that secured? Finally, why hadn't we the common sense to insure the boat? "Why, that old man and his pipe may set it on fire! Who knows? Who knows indeed, what pranks an old man with a pipe mayn't get up to?"

She went on working Sabina and me up to such a pitch that at last we sprang to our feet and stuck on our hats, and madly flew off in the direction of the boathouse, followed by Tintoretto, who can run, walk, and trot like a dog. In fact, Tintoretto's mother was a cat which, when it met a tragic end of by the tooth of a chow dog, was attested to by a retired clergyman as having walked between his legs and up down the narrow strip of garden (which is the portion Maida Vale) for years without number. There are cats and there are cats, and you won't match my Tintoretto in a hurry. Not that anything ever is matched in a hurry, according to my experience.

We all agreed how delightful it was to be out of those stuffy apartments, and we wondered why apartments always are stuffy. Selina said she thought it was the fault of the landladies. They gave themselves every sort of air except the air of heaven; and as a race she detested them—landladies and pew-openers. She went on to say that the beckoning finger of a pew-opener (if it was almost a thing of the past) had left an undying impression on her—the finger of ill-directed patronage and unseemly greed. She said the "itching palm" and the "tickled ear" had gone out simultaneously. She had noticed it; and not only she, but a cousin who had just arrived from India after

many years' absence had remarked the same thing. From this Selina drifted into a humorous description of cousins and uncles home from India after a long absence.

"Come back," she said, "looking like baked apples, and with the same amount of mind with which they went out. No growth whatever intellectually. Dwarfs – mental dwarfs. Pretty girl on the brain when they go out; pretty girl on the brain when they come back! Ask all round, 'How old are you now?' and give a tabulated statement of the exact age of each member of the home brigade. 'Cousin Lavina is forty-two (I know all about it) – forty-two. Kept those eyes (I remember them of old.) Cousin Lauretta looks a bit matronly. Yes. O, we see the difference. Saw Aunt Patty. Very shaky—very shaky indeed! As for me—old married man—grown-up sons and daughters. Wife retained her figure admirably—admirably. Detest this climate, Miss my Indian luxuries. Somebody there—nobody here! Marry my daughters out there? No, indeed! Men come home now to find a wife. And then the cousin from India calculates exactly if two cheroots will carry him safely back to Eastbourne, from whence he has travelled to look up his relatives and take the conceit out of them."

We found the old boatman just standing where we left him, pipe in mouth, hands in pockets, and boat idly rocking up and down on the nerveless tide. For how nerveless seemed the river! Motionless it lay; still, with the stillness known only to strength.

A full moon bathed her laughing face in the gleaming fringes of its tuneful ripple. Stars looked down and wondered in its deep all-remembering bosom. O River, take unto you a voice, and speak as a man would speak—a man who had somehow the voice of a god, and knew all things and understood all things. Tell us the secret of your gigantic strength and your mysterious weakness. Strength when to go with you,

to fly with you, is all you ask from us children of men; and tell us again the wherefore of your sullen moods, when nerve and sinew must be strained to their utmost to make headway against your desire to drive us back, back, 'back to that spot from which we started so hopefully but yesterday. Tell us the sweet madness of many a love-song to which your ear alone has listened, as the full heart of, man poured out its ineffable longings in the poor broken words of passion, which was heaven-born if it was worth or worthy the all-listening ear of the sweet old river, the mighty river Thames. Tell us again of the sighs which have breathed themselves out of the tortured spirits of sad hearts as the triumphant note of the river found no response in their down-trodden lives, and as if drawn to it because of its very triumph and the mighty rush of its inspiring song thundering down the weirs and tumbling on, on, on. They, sad souls, stretched out longing arms to its rushing tumultuous life, and gave themselves to its embrace, thinking death, perchance, now kinder, ay, kindest, and the river the sweet, kind, cruel river. The solemn, mournful triumphant river, its song is full of the lives of those whom it has known from first to last. For the river is to man both a parable of life and death, and its voice is the voice of a parable, and in parables alone — yes, alone—it speaketh.

There was just a sigh among the river sedges and the river grasses—that lovely quivering sigh which is known to Nature—tremulous, eloquent, pregnant. The sigh carried all that the river had to say; the river speaks in the whisper of the sedges and the grasses. It was Selina who awoke me from my Rousseau-like dreams. I have always understood Rousseau's love of Nature. Some people seem to me to be made out of Nature more than human nature. Don't attempt to follow me when I'm metaphysical. Leave that for the schools. For all I know, you may be like the farmer's

wife who said she really did sometimes look up at them stars, and wonder if they sold butter up there or made cheese. She apologised, did: that farmer's wife, for looking up, as much as to say 'twas decidedly her business to look down. Ten toes, planted firmly on *terra firma*, are more exciting to observe gyrating than ten stars twinkling on a blue platform called heaven! There are plenty of farmers' wives about, though they don't all sell butter and eggs.

Some wear coronets! Does this seem strange to you? Truth is stranger than fiction, and there's more butter and eggs about than you may be aware of – a great deal more.

"Surely you haven't been standing here all this time?" said Selina to the boatman. "Been home and had a cup of tea, and all that, I suppose?"

"Been home? yes. My old missus would take on fine if I didn't go home. Been home? yes; and seen William Jacobs' new suit of clothes lying on the floor idle — the suit which come by parcel post for the funeral of his aunt. Did he put it on? Not he. Too swinish to open it. Gone to the readin' of the will, and the certainty of falling into a tidy bit of money in the old clothes in which he drives the Osborne breed of cows to and fro and to and fro, Sykes! he's a queer 'un, is William Jacobs. He lodges with my missus and me. William never cleans his flesh. Dabs his finger in a drop of water and pats his hair; then dabs again and wets his face, and then tips his fingers. That's William all over. I speak openly, ladies, for I'm worried. Suits of clothes and mentioning in wills come to the worthless. Invariable, invariable. It's all a toss—all a toss. That old bull with a ring in its nose in that field to the left has just as much chance of being mentioned as left to me for-slaughter this side Christmas, as I have of being mentioned in the readin' of that will to which William Jacobs has taken off this day."

Sabina said what a vulgar thing was grumbling – this when Selina’s mind was fully set at rest as to the safety of the boat, and also when she had secured the air cushion, which she said would need refilling before starting tomorrow. I do so dislike air cushions. Not long ago I saw a leading counsel with one and I thought what an old woman he must be to sit on an air cushion. Anyhow, he must always be *en l’air*.

We hung about the river til it blew a great mist around us, and coiled and wound its mighty arms around us and bade us begone:

“For health is not in me now when the vapours torment me; and those children of mine, those microbes, rheumatism, sciatica, and fretful neuralgia, are torn of me. Heaven knows I would repudiate my microbes if I could; but I can’t. I bear them for my sins, I suppose. Begone, my lady scullers! begone from my banks to the haunted house yonder, encircled with its aureole of laurels! You don’t know what I know— how should you? She told the river her sad tale, and she returns sometimes to the spot where— What did I say? Hush! When the moon clouds her face I stop talking. My tides are bound up with the moon: she is my divinity.”

CHAPTER VII

WE HAVE A DREADFUL NIGHT, –
WE SEE AND HEAR STRANGE THINGS

JUST AS WE TURNED up the lane, on our way to our apartments, Sabina Ann gave an awful jump. She jumps exactly like a frog, low in the air, and with a fall back, as if she was resting. Selina is not at all nervous, neither am. I particularly so; but we all took to shying into the hedge, after that horrid jump of Sabina Ann’s.

“Well, what is it?” I said crossly, after a dead silence of several seconds, during which time my heart bumped against my ribs till I thought it would burst. “Tush!” said Selina, “it’s those horrid country bumpin’ lovers again. There they are silent as the dead. Why don’t they speak-out of a full heart? Well at least they are harmless, poor demented souls. Shoulder up, Sabina Ann, and don’t be so absurdly nervous. What will you be like as an old woman? Cultivate a calm and impassive bearing; learn control; be as I am.”

It’s my way to be always making observations. I don’t know when I’m making them; for observation is part of my life. Observation leads to deduction, and deduction leads on to reaches quite out of the ordinary beat, so I won’t go into that; but it was certainly curious of Selina to think I had not noticed her frantic plunge into the hedge.

Sabina can hold her own—a somewhat uncommon virtue; for it needs a great deal of experience to hold your own in a world like this. I wonder if it would be easier to hold one’s own in the planet Mars, for instance, peopled as it is—according to the last Paris scientific observations, made by means of photography—with people twelve feet high—far, far in advance of us in every way? But that might easily be; for I’m sure, every day that I live, I become more than ever convinced of our terrible savagery and ignorance about all things, from religion to politics. When the Archbishop of Canterbury folded his hands and gave the blessing over the fuss about candles and postures the other day, I also folded my hands, and said to myself, “We fight about a candle, as if, amid the awful realities, such matters were worth contending over! How do they worship—those twelve-feet high people in Mars—I wonder? Do they wrangle and persecute up there?”

But to return to Sabina Ann. She was facing Selina with her very direct gaze. Sabina Ann has large

powerful eyes; you don't get away from them; they career over you, and keep on absorbing you into that invisible self which is Sabina Ann. That's clumsy, I know, but I don't know that it's much more so than much else that's torturously difficult.

Well, Sabina Ann had fixed Selina with her eyes, and Selina didn't like it. That's how Sabina Ann holds her own, and will hold her own, till her eyes creep away to the 'backs"—a way eyes have when we grow old.

"Well, well, well!" said Selina, "we are three cowards, I take it!" And she laughed; and then we all laughed, and then started at our laughter, and then we reached our rooms.

It was quite delightful to see Mrs. Harbottle (the landlady) standing in the passage to greet us. I think we must have been feeling that odd, queer feeling which we call loneliness creeping over us, for we all greeted her with effusion.

We were so glad to get back! and we would have some tea; and had she night-lights? and would she be sure to call us at six on the morrow? and we were going to try the piano—it looked extremely good, and so on.

Mrs. Harbottle panted up-stairs behind us, and turned up the gas in the sitting-room, and opened the piano and drew down the blinds, and said:

"The Hereditary was dining, and would, she was certain, enjoy the music. In his Schloss near Baden Baden, he had told her, he had his own band. He said it was the fashion to think that German princes could not do things in style; but, '*Donner und Blitzen!*' it was there things were done in style. 'Where is your Sovereign's own band?' The bands of the entire Army belong to our Queen, as I told his Hereditary; but he said, shaking his finger in my face:

" 'I had my own; I composed my own music, and they play it—play it,' he said, 'as only Germans can play! Large movements—wide—big—thoughtful!'

“Dear me, ladies!” she continued, “how I should like his Hereditary – sometimes she called him *E*reditary, sometimes *Hi- Hi- Hereditary*, and sometimes *E*redity – “to see you three fine ladies: Now then I should!”

The discreet Mrs. Harbottle was too clever, too old a hand, to wait and hear our answer: she knew, what we all knew, that doubtful matters are best allowed to sink into the mind, and come up full-blown, as assents or dissents, She just waddled off with a side-glance at Selina, who was arranging her pigtails at a horrible mirror, with its distorted representations of things, animate and inanimate. That mirror was exactly like an old gossip that I know, who distorts truth till it looks like a lie (which is the way of things in this world.) Selina it was who took up the parable. “What did dear, cross, humorous, torturous old Carlyle say about the ‘tongues of innumerable old women?’ If he hadn’t been smothered in his own cleverness, I think he hits off things as they are better than anybody I ever came across. Most decidedly! Mrs. Harbottle shall introduce the Hi-Hi-Hi-reditary. I believe he’s a convict escaped from Portsmouth, Whoever heard of a Grand Ducal Sausage galore in apartments at Sunbury? Where is the accompanying demon? Why, the gentleman has no attendant! He must be awfully ‘sane’ to be permitted to rove about like this. These Hereditary gentlemen are scarce here, if they are frequent there.”

And Selina was vulgar enough to throw her thumb over her shoulder at an invisible Continent.

“If,” said Sabina Ann oracularly—“if the innumerable tongues of the innumerable old women were - or was it lived? - in the mind of Thomas Carlyle late Sage of Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, ever did one any good, then I would treat them (the tongues) with the respect due to all potted meats; but” – and here Sabina Ann flung a glance at the chandelier (a very grand discarded thing, with long curls, which had come out of

Hampton Court Palace, we heard afterwards) – “but there is not a five-pound note to be got out of those innumerable tongues, and that’s why I hate them, and have given and will give them all the go by. Tongues inspired and tongues uninspired all chant the same note when you come to ask them for a five-pound note or note for 5,000*l*. I have scant respect for the tongues of the innumerable, and you will never know what the soul of freedom is till”—and here Sabina’s great black eyes flamed—“till you respect yourself, and give the innumerable tongues the complete go-by. Then, and then only, can you rise to be what you are, true to yourself—whatever,” she added softly, “that self may be.”

“Well done, Sabina Ann!” said I. “The kingdom of women has yet to come, as we sang a little while ago on the river to the old gentleman with the gnat charity or ‘Home for Gnats,’ not on the brain but in open-mouthed expectancy. If there was a House of Ladies as well as a House of Lords, I think we could pass a few Bills, and end by making the men more than ever in love with us by our nice little discriminating sense of the needs of our time.”

“Could you see members of the House of Ladies, or School Board ladies, nursing a baby?” said Selina, looking rather idiotic at the moment, I must own. Sabina Ann got hold of a dreadful antimacassar (of all horrors), rolled it up into a neat ball, and flung it at Selina’s head, and said;

“That’s a wide question—a question the next century must answer. I’m not likely to be in it and so don’t care. All I care about is this wonderful introduction - through a landlady, of all people—to the Hi—Hi—Hireditary.”

The piano, a really good one, stood open, and Selina and commenced to play. Now the piano is of all instruments, the perhaps most difficult because, unless handled with the handling of a genius it is so

horribly vulgar. We all know the strum of the commonplace soul, and the "pickings" at the keys of the half-educated; for it requires heaven-born knowledge to play the piano; it (the piano) knows how to play with you a great deal better, as a rule, than you know how to play on it. The piano is like the world, after all. You must master it, or it will master you.

Selina is superb at the piano. She just sits down, like that Russian—what's his name?—Pad—something, and converts earth into a heaven of sound. Who her composers are you never dream of asking. You are taken clean out of those stupid questions. You sit back in your chair and close your eyes (if you like it best), and you (if, of course, you are a susceptible instrument to higher influences) let yourself go.

Sabina Ann sat with her toes on the fender, just as if she was sitting before a fire listening. I sat at the round table with my arms resting on it, and head bowed in silent rapture, when Mrs. Harbottle burst into the room.

"Forgive! pardon! ladies. The Ducal—his Highness says he never heard such playing; he never heard such a touch. May he come and express his admiration? May he——"

Selina's hands were resting on the keys; that peculiar force which the Polish people call "Zäll" had lighted each feature in her always expressive face. It was Selina with a halo about her. Yes! yes! yes!" said she; "bring him up. Why 'not? Three women afloat in a boat, Yo-ho! are prepared for anything and everything—princes in disguise, convicts in disguise, or ghosts habited in the flesh and spirits disembodied of the flesh. Bring him up, by all means."

CHAPTER VIII

WE CONTINUE AMONG THE DUCAL DUKES AND THE GHOSTAL GHOSTS

DID ANYBODY PERSONALLY described either in a book or an advertisement ever in in any way answer to the description when seen in the flesh? I'm sure I don't know how to describe this ducal gentleman who sought admission with a "H-m" outside the door and a timid knock. He (the Ducal) had got rid of Mrs. Harbottle; it was very unkind of him. I thought I heard a sort of retreating scuffle of black cashmere boots somewhere, and a "Certainly, your Highness, certainly" — echo: Certainly, certainly."

Come in!" said Selina, and come in he did.

Well, I will try and describe him. He was tall, very tall, miserably tall I call it, for he had gone creeping on after that lamp-post till the lamp-post had evidently said to him, "Go on, go on, and leave me behind, I'm tail enough to light the little folks below me about, Let your own planet light you about." He was thin, miserably 'thin I called it. No membranous receptacles—nothing of the kind. Depression—total, absolute, undeniable. The markets of the world knew him not. The flesh of bulls was strange unto him. General bankruptcy all round was the outside envelope. His hair—well, what there was of it—was neatly arranged, economically managed. His eyes were small, disgustingly small because small eyes belong to the genus pig only, and whatever "his Ducal" was, he was not a pig.

His mouth – it was just walloped and lolloped, and left you no hope of his formulating nervous speech. His nose, well, it was utterly insignificant; it seemed to have settled on his face in an absent sort of way, and there remained, too unworthy of his notice or anybody else's to take flight.

He bowed, and he bowed again; and he bowed and he bowed again. The mouth that walloped and lolloped began to speak, and the little tiny eyes to twinkle.

“Fräuleins! English ladies, I could not resist the music. Music is to me what it was and is to the old serpent—music is to me a charm; music draws my fangs. I cease to have a fang in me when I listen to such a touch as just now made these walls tremble and speak, and will leave for ever an undying volume of sound somewhere. The nation to which I have the honour to belong is a musical nation. It was the Fräulein at the piano who played?” He twinkled at Selina and bowed again, and then he made a horrid grinding noise—something wrong somewhere, I fancy; I don’t know—and said, “The English lady is to me the embodiment of the eternal ‘She,’ whom we authors endeavour to portray from your Rider Haggard, with his pen steeped in magic, to the done-up authors who hold on till, by virtue of natural selection, they must give out.”

The Dueality was standing and holding on to the round table as he talked, and his head was careering far away beyond the ringletted glass chandelier. There was a large continent of water indicated on the ceiling, and pointing to a broken pipe somewhere, and on this continent the Hereditary now fixed his eyes. Where he fixed them there they grew, and developed images which he flung off in random shots of talk. Now and then his hands got away from: clutching the table, and he worked ‘his fingers nervously, and roosted first on one leg and then on the other. We were all arrested by him he was so uncommon.

Selina’s hands still hovered over the piano, Certainly Selina looked wondrously handsome; at moments she does. She is very provoking; her beauty is entirely momentary and dependent on moods. I think her beauty is like inspiration. Tam sure the Hereditary

saw it; for once or twice he removed his eyes from the unhappy continent on the ceiling to the face of Selina and on each occasion he dropped the thread of his argument, and said, "*Donner und blitzen.*"

Sabina Ann is always kind when it costs her nothing. Perhaps it's rather hard of me to say this of Sabina Ann, whom I delight in almost as much as I delight in Selina; but nevertheless it is a fact. She slid a chair for the Hereditary to sit upon—rather cruel to "sit upon" our kind friends the chairs—and he sank into it with unaffected gratitude, murmuring little apologetic nothings,

He seemed thoroughly happy. I think he had what Pope Gregory calls "the terrible gift of familiarity." Extremes meet; the highest and the lowest have it. Mediums know it not. The high arrive at it because they know so much, and the low because they know so little. The mediums arrive at no conclusions, because they are half-educated in all things, and are too proud or too conceited to ask; hence the inanity of most medium-class society.

"You are aware that this house is haunted?" he said suddenly— "that's why I am here. I seek out haunted people and haunted houses for my books. I am like the Queen of Roumania—I like to be in seclusion now and then to attach to myself the Muses and the"—he paused and gathered his feet away from the other end of the room where they had wandered, such was the length of him – "Graces."

"The Muses will be sufficient for your Highness, I am sure," said Selina, "The Graces would be confusion worse confounded."

The Hereditary smiled, if opening and shutting your mouth and saying "Ha!" is smiling. Then he rose. It was a rising. Up, up he towered.

"Ladies," he said, "the grace and the charm of you will expel the ghost. Such music," he continued, turning

to Selina, "must lay her. Yes, it will lay her. May I just for one minute try your piano?"

Selina rushed off the stool and sat on a chair near him, almost facing him; anyhow, where he could turn his head at her now and again, after the German style. Sabina Ann and I withdrew to a distant sofa at the other end of the room. All I can say is, if his books play on the feelings of his readers as his music played on our feelings, the result will be such a rush on the book market the publishers will be grovelling at the Hi-Hi-Hi-reditary toes. He played exactly like an antediluvian old maid— all pirouettes, twirls, and skirts, held out with an eye to showing how many breadths it (the skirt) held. Twirl and whirl, and whirl and twirl, and throwing up his eyes as if he were repudiating proposals (of any kind you like to imagine) by the hundred.

Sabina. Ann got hold of one of Mrs. Harbottle's red velveteen cushions and doubled it up into the shape of a sausage, and threatened, with pantomimic gestures, to throw it at his exalted back, I held her in, suffocating with: laughter. We wrestled over that red velveteen cushion I believe, for ten minutes, while our Grand Ducal acquaintance played to his own Muse— his own inward Muse."

At last the grandfather-clock on the landing struck ten and the slow, solemn, rebuking note of the grand, old clock-man mingled with a measure he had just wandered into. The Ducal got up on his legs as if shocked.

"Ten o'clock! Forgive me! I beg most profoundly to thank you young ladies for a charming evening. Never have I enjoyed myself more; never shall I enjoy myself more! Your simple, happy ways, your exuberant spirits have made me in accord with this old dull world. I had thought of cremation about an hour ago, now I think of – O, never mind what I think of! What

would this world be without the eternal ‘She’? Adieu, demoiselles! Adieu ladies!”

Bow, bow, repeated bow. Back, backing, repeated and accentuated trippings! He was gone.

He was gone; but not without one glance at Selina from those little pig eyes, which it wanted Miss Pipkin to decipher. Highy-tighty; flirty-flighty! Was he morganatically in earnest.

“I like him,” said Selina, as the door closed, I like him hugely. He is hideously ugly; but what of that? He has a hunch.”

“But no body,” I said.

“Bother the body!” said Selina. “You can’t talk with a body, you talk with a mind. It is hard on the mind to have to carry about so extraordinary a body; but I like him.”

Selina was again at the glass and flinging about her pigtails quite recklessly. Her colour, too, was quite brilliant. Woman-like, she had imagined that there was admiration in the air; and if doctors could prescribe proposals as readily as their medicines, there would be less illness about in some quarters—much less.

“He is old, dreadfully old,” I said gloomily; “horridly old!”

“Only a little old, as somebody said of a pheasant,” said Selina. “I have never had that aversion to the old which is characteristic of you Phoebe; there is no veneration in your ill-shaped head.”

“Selina,” I said, “who lives more among old curiosities than I do? But I do not want to marry an old curiosity!”

Selina began to heave like a bark on the ocean—she always rocks when she laughs—and Sabina Ann began to crow like a cock at break of day.

How delicious is laughter! it doeth good like medicine. Laugh and grow fat; laugh and grow kind; laugh and forget your banker’s book; laugh and make

humorous kindly game of your enemies (if you have any); game-pie, any sort of pie but that dreadful pie which calls everybody a wandering star reserved for the darkness and blackness of wrath to come who does not agree with you.

"Nightlights," said I, as I gathered up Tintoretto.

"They are what I call invalid geniuses; still, there is some knowledge of surrounding objects to be had out of them. Let's have two a-piece."

"O dear!" groaned Selina; "and I have to encounter that awful bed with its 'odes of Greece!' What courage life needs! I never got into a bed, either in apartments or hotels, without feelings best left unmentioned before an unfeeling world. O dear! O dear!"

By this time we were all gambolling up the broad old-fashioned staircase, which creaked as we moved, and repeated our footsteps with quite an octave of solemn sounds. Tintoretto's great green eyes were shining like stars, and her fur looked rather what I should call on end. At the top of the staircase long narrow galleries branched off to the right or left; numerous doors indicated numerous bedrooms. It was a very big rambling old place, and must, in past years, have belonged to people of consideration—or shall we say the house was worthy of consideration, while probably the people were not.

The sitting-room, which we had just left, had evidently been furnished out of auction-rooms by Mr. Harbottle; everything there was veneer and jimcracks of one sort and another; but, incongruously enough, about the landings there were pieces of tattered old tapestry, hangings, representations of scenes of a bygone age. I stood to admire a gallant with a hawk; it was all very dim, but my imagination helped it out. I pulled aside the tapestry, and saw what looked like a walled-up door behind it. Over this door there was an old carved coat-of-arms in oak, and a motto in French; "Pour vous mais non pour moi."

"Where does that door lead to?" I said. "Can it possibly be a secret way down, to the river? It is evidently a door, is it not?" I continued, and I pushed it with my hands. To my amazement it gave way almost noiselessly, and glided back after the fashion of a sliding panel. Selina was holding the candle aloft. We neither of us in our surprise uttered a word; for, facing us, two steps down, was a sitting-room, and in that sitting-room, sitting with her head in her hands, was what looked like a very tall old woman in a poke-bonnet and long black cloak.

Seeing her sitting there in such apparent distress of mind, and startled as we were at our entrance into this unsuspected room, either Selina or I murmured something like an apology. Reader, the dead need no apologies. We addressed the living dead.

I can't say we saw her face, for as we spoke she vanished! Thin grey air gathered in a cloud where she had sat, and slowly and solemnly just disappeared. That was all.

I turned to Selina; she was trembling violently.

"Come away! Don't you see it's—it's—it's—"

A breath of cold air, cold as ice, colder than the touch of an Arctic breath borne on the wave of an Arctic sea, swept past us. It extinguished the candle, and left us helplessly groping in utter darkness!

CHAPTER IX

WE CALMLY DISCUSS THE OLD WOMAN IN THE LONG BLACK CLOAK
AND BONNET. WE REALLY SAW HER, BEING, AS WE ARE, THREE
OF THE MOST UNIMAGINATIVE PEOPLE IN THE WORLD

"HAVE YOU A MATCH?" Sabina spoke as calmly as if we were in the midst of ordinary surroundings. 'She is a capital little stand-by woman, holding her nerves as some people hold money—wisely and well, "If so," she continued, "strike it. Here! hand the box to me,

Phœbe Winter.” (Winter is my surname; I think that’s why I am so passionately fond of summer.) “Play the woman! Selina, we expect you to collapse; you great big fine women always do, while the little squibs—” “Sabina,” said I indignantly, “when we measured at Girton you know well where you were. Your self-complacency will carry you through everything, even through the unbecomingness of a poke-bonnet. What a poke-bonnet our Ghost wears!”

From all this you will gather we managed to comport ourselves with some dignity under the circumstances, and were in some sort equal to the occasion.

The candle lighted, Sabina seized it from Selina and held it aloft. She looked quite imposing with it held high above her head, and the slanting rays emanating from it beaming pallidly down on her eager face. At all times Sabina Ann has a face from which you would expect something. Thought has worked its way into each feature; it is at moments even a powerful face, but the possessing powers that reign are rather small and inquisitorial. She is never big and charmingly break-your-lank generous. If Sabina opens her purse she knows exactly how much she has in it, and how much she is going to take out of it. She wouldn’t throw it at you and say, “I hope there is something in it which will make it worthy of you and of me.” Not she! She has a horrid Pharisaical way, too, of talking of morals, as if morals were all rolled up in her little bit of parchment; and every now and then she will look at me as if I hadn’t a moral (not one) to bless myself with. When she looks like that I let her have it.

“Sabina Ann, you are like the town clerk at Ephesus—upon my word you are, only you haven’t his position.”

Our scrutiny embraced the room; we flared the candle first into one corner and then into another,

and where we flared it there we peered. What we saw was this; a square-shaped room with diamond panes, through which the ascending moon now looked with a long high stare—cold, hard, indifferent. I know nothing in the world of Nature that can look so superlatively indifferent as a moon which is soaring upward with a light breeze after it. Cry to it? O, the indifference! The moon has the mood now and then of a maiden who listens to the entreaties of her would-be lover with a mocking smile.

To her, love—what is it? A Latin prayer in the ear of a peasant.

Black clouds now and then rushed gustily over its still face and then massed and fled on, like scouts doing the bidding of the invisible hierarchies.

The furniture was all of a bygone century and belonged to the stiffest of stiff periods. Hard lines, ungraceful indications of what had but half formulated itself in the mind of workers in wood, brass, and stone of that century. There was a small round table, not exactly Royal-looking. There was a bedstead with a canopy, and arms—the motto, “Pour vous, mais pas pour moi,” again figuring. There was also something lying on the bed. Sabina went up to it, cool as a cucumber. (Delicious old simile!)

“Hm! A black cloak, is it? Double-hooded too! Artful old woman! Old, ugly, and artful, as my brother is always saying. What next? a poke-bonnet! Well, I have seen the pig in the poke; it only remained to see the old woman in the poke, and Sabina Ann takes her place among the prophets. Now that old woman was sitting in that cloak and bonnet a few minutes ago in that chair,” (pointing at it), ‘What an old fidget to take it off so soon! It’s the fashion to live in bonnets and hats.”

“Sabina Ann, I feel so faint. Do be quiet.” It was Selina; her hand was clasped tight on her side, and she certainly looked very pale.

"Don't be a donkey; it's your poor liver again. Nervousness is all liver."

"Little materialistic monster," said Selina, immediately firing; "you know we saw a ghost. Heaps of people have seen them, but, for fear of being laughed at by the stupid who believe in nothing, from a ghost to dinner at the Mansion House, won't, won't let on."

Facing the sliding-panel at which we had entered was an old mouldy oak door with a knocker, and two panes of glass let in in a mode in vogue centuries ago. Selina's nose was flattened against one of those panes, and she declared that she saw a long, winding, tree-begirt alley, which wound on and on to the river.

"So," said she, "the ghost is a river lady! She comes up from the river, depend on it, and to the river she returns. There was some river tragedy, I suppose in which she took her part." We discussed her a little longer, and then, in a rather mixed bundle of three, got to the doorway, and so to our bedroom.

We had a dreadful night; that house at Sunbury is horribly haunted, I am certain of it. Boxes were dragged up and down the broad staircase for hours by invisible hands. Selina vowed that a cold finger was laid on her forehead, and Sabina declared that a hand with big knuckles had dragged at the bedclothes. Tintoretto was occupied all night, to my certain knowledge, with watching at a hole for a mouse that never came; and I, worn out at last, did, I most solemnly declare, get up and invoke those ghosts in these words:

"Whoever you are, wherever you are, and whatever you are, I command you to cease this noise, and get you gone!" and I do hereby declare that an intense stillness thereafter fell upon the house, and when Mrs. Harbottle called us at the hour at which we had earnestly invoked her, we were all as cross as

Tintoretto at being disturbed, and abused her as a tiresome person who hated to think others were slumbering when she was working about and "doing" for you.

CHAPTER X

WE RACE WITH THE PECKSNIFF'S DREAM

SABINA ANN WAS FRIGHTFULLY impatient to be off the next morning. She said she feared catarrhal fever was coming on; she felt very queer, Tintoretto must be related to that fever. I wonder if the doctors have investigated its origin and connection with Tintoretto in general? She said she had no intention of being laid up in apartments. No, she would rather stick by the boat if the end of the end was coming; and here she sneezed in a sudden and disgracefully loud ill-bred manner, which horrified Selina and me. Really, if people have colds the best place is decidedly their private rooms; they are not fit for society, being full of catarrhal infection, and they are hardly fit for their own, between sneezing and coughing.

"For Heaven's sake, don't be so depressing, Sabina," said to Selina at last; "you run down like a thermometer. We shall be ready to start in a few minutes; for my part I am in no such desperate hurry. The day is young and the river is old, so the one can wait and the other has learnt to wait."

I long for a breath of air," said Sabina. "My hands are like fire; do feel them."

"I shall send for Dr. Octavius Darling if you go on like this," said Selina. "I shall not feel your hand or your pulse. You are perfectly well. Your eyes are bright. Your colour is good, and you are just catching at ailments, unworthy of a boating woman, to hurry Phoebe and me away from these apartments, and to stay, goodness knows what a pleasant little episode,

among the waste places of earth, for perchance one of us. I don't say me, I don't say you, and I don't say Phœbe

"Well, it can't be all three of us," I said; "the romance will have to be localised somewhere."

"Don't you know we started with one absorbing idea in our heads, and that was boating; to hang about in apartments is to stay action," said Sabina Ann, who was wandering aimlessly about the room. "Let us pack. I really feel unequal to the task, and beg of you both to put in my toothbrush, and my nightgown, and brush-bag; I'm particular over nothing else, unless it be my tooth-powder; when beauty fades there is nothing much left but the gleam of ones' teeth. I feel very old and sunk down today, quite a wearied woman; I do really. I can't think what is the matter with me. Just feel my hand, dear, dear Selina, do; I am usually so 'spry'."

"Very well, I will," said Selina; and mind you must do as I tell you."

By this time Sabina had got into the only comfortable chair in the room, the saddle-bag armchair, at which Mrs. Harbottle had triumphantly pointed when branching off (as she had branched) into the ethics of furniture. She lay back in it with an air of having the "pip" more than anything else. Selina stood towering over her, with her fingers on her pulse.

"Adipose secretion, causing an accelerated pulse," she said; "violent exercise and unwonted bustling necessary. Packing the best of all possible cures. Get up and pack that portmanteau directly."

Then ensued a wrestling, bear-fighting arrangement only worthy of freshmen. Sabina flew round the table, followed by Selina; they kicked over the footstools, and flung the velveteen cushions at each other's heads. It is not given to many to see two Girton girls behave as they did. My voice of remonstrance was drowned. I called up Uncle Pipkin and the incubating

Miss Pipkin. I admonished them in accents of heartrending entreaty all to no purpose! They, continued to bear-fight till I expected I know not what reprimand on their conduct from Mrs Harbottle, who however feigned deafness as King David feigned madness, I concluded, for she didn't appear but somebody else did, and that was no less a person than the Hereditary Grand Ducal!

He burst upon us, but without previous announcement, and once in the room, he assailed our ears with such innumerable apologies for his boldness that we had not the heart to be angry.

"I knocked like one of your little maids-of-all-work would knock" he said humbly. "I knocked and knocked but to no purpose. Finally, I made myself bold. I encouraged myself with that sublime thought, 'Fortune favours the brave'; I entered paradise and once in, fiends shan't turn me out, before, at least, I have presented each of you with a few flowers; the flowers speaking for me as only flowers can."

We wondered where the flowers were, but were not long kept in ignorance. The Hereditary legs transported the Hereditary body out of the room; in a few seconds he returned, laden with three huge bouquets, tied with ribbons red, white, and blue. Each bouquet was identically the same as the others; so was each bow. Honours were divided in this game of whist. He presented each bouquet with a falling bow, like the tumbling waters of a human Niagara, and said:

"You English people are to this day an heroic people, also an athletic people. I insist on the athletics. The oar is the national safeguard against that horrible luxury which overtook Rome and killed Greece. Athletic men, and athletic women, are always the best champions of the laws of health and purity. Whither, fair ladies of the oar, are you now wending

your way? Mine hostess, the landlady, tells me you are going immediately."

"To Walton!" said Selina, a little hurriedly.

"To Chertsey!" I said Sabina Ann, a little nervously.

"To Windsor!" said I pompously.

"Then the happy stars will bring us again together. I shall be due at the last place some day." Again he looked at Selina, who looked back at him, I thought a little indignantly. Three bouquets with three sets of ribbon were rather like three cheers for the red, white, and blue, but which was the favourite colour? The bows of last night were then repeated, lacking perhaps, a little of the fire of the evening glow, and he was gone.

How happy could I be with either, Were t'other dear charmer away!" said Sabina tritely. "I believe it's me."

"Go to," said Selina. "There is no fool like an old fool,' is an old-world proverb."

"Now, now, none of that," said I. "I'll back Sabina against anybody, if she means business," "Which she doesn't," said Sabina (who was by now perfectly recovered.) "Sabina is a free soul, who scorns all desire to get out of one boat into another, She is satisfied with her own position, fancy free, and maiden blush, and wouldn't be married to anything Hereditary for worlds."

"Wait!" said Selina. "Wait! wait!"

It's not often Selina looks so portentously prophetic. To take my readers into my confidence. Have you ever seen the face of the coming old woman look out of the face of the present-day young woman? That's what befell Selina. I saw Selina as she will be at ninety.

"My dear," I said, "it will be all right; it will be all right."

There is wonderful strength in somebody telling us "It will be all right." We have a yearning after our human prophets, and often and often that cheap saying, "It will be all right," has quickened our faith into 'a firm

belief in an eternity of good. The odds are on the side of the good.

We packed the portmanteau between us, shying in the things, I'm afraid, anyhow. The hair-wash, of course, had got out and had soaked into Sabina's ridiculous pair of house shoes, a pair of Paris shoes, with real diamond buckles too – no French paste – a present from Uncle Pipkin on the birthday of a new curry. Sabina put her hands up to her head, and ran around the room like a mad dog. But it was no good, the deed was done. The tooth powder; too, had gone astray, and had mixed itself with the hair-brushes.

"Let's shut up the things altogether," said Selina at last, "and strap them in, and do without one of them. I'm sick of the whole lot of them. I miss my maid; upon my word I do!"

Now no airs and graces, or frills and tuckers," said I. "Maids were not 'made' for everybody, and in my opinion grown-up persons who can't dress themselves and pack themselves are children!"

"The child-woman, that's just what Selina is, after all," said Sabina. "Wheel her round the garden on Lucilla's grey horse." (Lucilla is Selina's niece.) "Now let us pay the landlady. Out with that brown purse of yours with its bulgy sides, and patent lock and key; you are paymistress. That's soon done."

We rang up the Harbottle (a mistake there somewhere; it ought surely to be Bluebottle), and we paid our bill cheerfully. We didn't hug the bill up to our nose and say, "I consider it outrageous," though I'm bound to say it was outrageous. What with the high tea, and the hot and cold laid on, she had mounted it up to £8 15s. 6¾d.

I did hear Selina say afterwards that she had "*looked* at her!" I don't know what she meant by emphasising the "looked at-her!" And she also said on another occasion, "Never get familiar with your inferiors." We had been too pleasant. Those sort of folks always

make you pay over—no, under—the nose if you are too pleasant.

Sabina Ann carried the portmanteau. Selina carried the air-cushion (which she had blown out to the proportions of a home-fed sucking-pig.) No wonder she wanted to sit down and rest on a stone set up like a Jacob's pillar *en route*! All that loss of vital spark (for it comes to that) wasted on an air-cushion! I carried Tintoretto and the red boat-umbrella.

We all poked as neat as new pins, and walked in single file, very much admired (we fancied), or why did people run to their shop-doors and grin, and stare and nudge, and call another neighbour and gather into knots? Dozens of little boys endeavoured to wrest the portmanteau from Sabina Ann, but she stuck to it like a Briton. At any rate, we hadn't half the things to carry that Jerome K. Jerome's "three men" had, and the crowd didn't grow like theirs did.

Tintoretto is twice as well-behaved as Montmorency. She is the mother of one kitten, which she saved from drowning with her other twelve (dear pet!) by rushing it into a clothes basket; and after hiding it there (much as Hagar hid her Ishmael) for one whole night, she came and mewed and entreated for its life by hurling herself into the basket with it, and pleading with the unutterable eloquence of a cat that the destroying cook (not angel) might spare it.

And so we got to the river, the shining river, and got into place, and laughed up at the sun for pure joy, and ran our fingers along in the water for the mere delight of testing its delicious coolness; and the river, to our fond imagination, seemed glad to see us, for it rocked our boat as a mother rocks her infant's cradle, tenderly, tunefully, thoughtfully, and the trees seemed to bow their haughtiness before 'us as if they: acknowledged that we could speak of them as those who loved them, if not with wisdom of King Solomon,

at least with the patient investigation of botanists; and the pure sweet river air playfully rushed round us, and murmured and sighed out it's hundred songs in our glad ears.

We had started with the long, calm, strong stroke which is, I consider, the stroke of measured strength. You pull away from most scullers if you begin as we began. For instance, there were dozens of craft afloat when we started; something was "on," and the 'Arries' had come from far and near. One of these gentlemen was determined to race us. He had a boat called "Pecksniff's Dream" — a curious name for a boat—some connection with Dickens, evidently.

"I forbid racing!" I said sternly, as I saw Selina getting down to her work, and Sabina Ann putting her back into it and kicking at her stretcher in a way that meant death or victory.

Racing, like gambling, is not a sin *per se*; but the Champion had cautioned us not to race, and I saw very well what was in the air.

"No racing!" I said, with a slow distinct utterance, using my teeth to make the words bite. "If you race I'll lodge the nose of the boat in that bank. I'll capsize it; I'm at the rudder." I spoke to the winds.

"Pecksniff's Dream" was becoming a reality. He was gaining, gaining, gaining! Selina just turned her head, and looked straight into Sabina's eyes! The thing was done. We were racing—racing as hard as the Eights any day!—racing in grand form, I can tell you!

Seeing that I had lost the day of wise counsel, I went in for the madness of pure sport. I even found myself urging those two girls on as hard as I could.

"Go it, Sabina! Well done, Selina! Never be beat! Don't be beat! Go it! go it! I'll dodge in between those two boats; I'll creep in between those two steamers; I'll crawl along under the bank but be beat never! "Go it, Selina! my splendid Sabina! My clever darling

Sabina, go it! Noble girls! Noble Bereans! Won't I *fête* you after this.

The boat was leaping along; the oars were literally thrashing the water. Yet the high feather was maintained, the swing even, and the catch gripping. I could hear the deep breathing of Selina and Sabina; they were straining nerve and sinew to win the day.

The water-road to Chertsey winds in and out—intercepts you. Surprise turns and crooked bends make you, if you know your river, as crafty as any old fox. To our delight (for we had now come to that pitch of enthusiastic indifference that we were charmed with this river notoriety! we were ready to clasp old sheep-bell “Notoriety” to our hearts), a steamer packed with pleasure-folks was following hard on us. Seeing we were racing, with true patriotic love of sport they kept behind—close behind, but not close enough to flurry us.

A mass of heads were collected in the bows; handkerchiefs were waved, and great strong voices yelled, “Hurrah! Well done, bow! Bravo, stroke! Hurrah, cox!”

The air was full of animation. “More to the left—right, left, turn!” gasped Selina, as we kept the tortuous course. “Keep us in! Keep us out of the stream! Hug the bank!”

“Pecksniff's Dream” was now nearly neck and neck. “Keep your minds calm and cool!” I gasped. “The man is grinning like a savage; he is about to eat us! Now put it on. Now let her go!”

Then came a spurt from Selina and Sabina which would have done credit to a Varsity finish. With admirable coolness they put on a tremendous stroke—I should think nearly forty to the minute.

Now our boat commenced to forge ahead. I looked out for our ‘Arry.’ I saw symptoms of distress; his mouth was open. (“Ah,” I said, “His mouth is open.”) I noticed a frightful giving in his back; he was two double. He

looked out anxiously at us. We were now nearly a clear length ahead. I pulled across, and took his water to give him our wash, and so dishearten him as much as possible. This distressed him frightfully. Still he pursued; but I could see from the light on Selina's and Sabina's faces that the game was up, the race won.

The bridge of Chertsey hove in view.

"Now for an easy," said Selina, as she caught her absurd little lace-begirt handkerchief out of her outside pocket, and lightly passed it across her forehead.

"Ship your sculls, Sabina. Pull into the bank, Phœbe. We will go out into the middle by and by, and catch roach and perch and anything else that's going, and handle that frying-pan, and sleep under the tarpaulin. What a slow life some people lead, to be sure! I never felt so alive in my life. I feel at peace with everybody — even poor dear 'Arry,' whom we shall never, never see again! Nothing pays like success! Pull in, dear; the race is won!"

CHAPTER XI

FISHING FOR ROACH AND TALKING ABOUT HENLEY REGATTA

THAT AFTERNOON WE FISHED for roach and perch. To get our boat anchored had been a tremendous affair. Sabina took the casting of that anchor in hand. It dragged a bit at first, and we found ourselves drifting down stream; then after a little we felt the tugging of our anchor at the nose of the boat—"pulling its nose," as Selina called it—and eventually we found ourselves held by the nose. Then we began to fish. We had three little common Japanese telescope rods, and we had baited our ground with scraps of all kinds. We didn't go in for meal pills, like old river

hands, and all the horrors of punt doings, but we still did our little best to draw the fish.

We worked the "oracle" slowly and solemnly for some time in utter silence—expectant silence! Once I heard Sabina whisper: "Everything comes to the feet of those who know how to wait"; and then she squinted down at her toes, as if she expected to see something laid down there. At last, I confess, I got sick of it, and I said that fishing required a passive temperament, and that I should never be able to catch fish.

Then Selina got a great tug, and screamed worse than the lady over the potted ham. She said it made her downright nervous, and she hoped the fish would understand she didn't want them to rise. She had no serious intentions, only wanted a bit of fun. A tug like that was inconceivable boldness on the part of one of the "Carp" family.

Sabina Ann said she had always considered Selina a coward at bottom; and, for her part, if the fish offered to rise, she was certain the courage would be given to her whereby to land it—to land it, she reiterated. But, she continued, she was certain her shadow was enough for the fish, for she hadn't had a rise—but one! but one! (this with a slow melancholy roll of her head.) As for me, I looked at my floating line, and seeing that nothing came of it, I remarked "that the indifference of roach and perch was extraordinary." I shouldn't carp over it, like Sabina and Selina, but learn to be as pleased with a bait without as a result a bait! (True philosophy.) Selina said fishing from a boat had a ridiculous look. She was certain we looked ridiculous; and to talk sense and look ridiculous was worse, to her mind, than to talk ridiculous and look sense, and then she flung herself down at the bottom of the boat, and said she shouldn't take her revenge on the fish—she declined to catch them. She should withdraw her rod, and leave the result to us. She also

said she wished to be left in peace; and, further, that she feared a September sun—heated, as it is, with the threefold strength of the kiss of a going-down sun—was injuring her complexion, and she begged us not to mind her placing her pocket-handkerchief over her face. She had forgotten to bring her scarlet gauze veil. So there she lay, looking inconceivably melancholy, till Sabina drew her line softly out of the water and landed her bait on Selina's nose, which was sharply indicated under the handkerchief, whereupon Selina jumped furiously up, and the boat all but capsized. "Right her, we are shipping water!" I exclaimed. "Steady the boat!" Then we had to bail out the water with one of our mugs, and I spoke very sharply indeed to Selina. I told her she was doing what many another had done before her—lie down and kick when things went adversely. To get up and kick, I said, was far better; that meant self-help: the other was a lazy, helpless course of action, likely to land neither carp, nor roach, nor perch. "If you take to that sort of thing, Selina," I said, "you will never get up again, never! and, I tell you, Sabina Ann and I shall walk over you rough-shod. I don't intend to stand here, with this blazing sun beating down on my sensitive cranium, filling mugs with the water that your incapacity to land fish has brought upon us." At this juncture Sabina gave an extraordinary chuckle; the sound was peculiar, I can't describe it. It was more like a bird of prey than aught else, She was landing something. O, what a dance that roach led her! It rose, nibbled, went under; rose again, nibbled, and floundered, and got off the hook, and was gone; came back—unprecedented occurrence out fishing—and was on again. Then Sabina stood up to her work. She pulled; the roach pulled back. She drew in her line sharp. The roach now seemed secure; but suddenly with one great big tug, that enormous roach (for we saw it for one moment, and

one moment only) got up; and it is my belief I saw it look at Sabina, and then, with one great jump, carry her telescope Japanese rod and her line, and, best of all, her bait, clean off, and deliver the whole of it up to Madame Roach, and all the little Roach waiting to know the issue of that fish-catching exploit. I didn't look at Sabina—I couldn't; I was yelling. It was very unladylike of me, very much so; but on that account I enjoyed it all the more. Unless laughter is tinged with a fearsome dread of consequences, it loses all its zest. We shall be angels, not men and women, when our sense of humour leaves us.

Sabina went to the portmanteau in silence, and got out a horrible long cloudy arrangement in wool, which had been made for her during the long winter nights by Miss Pipkin when Mr. Pipkin read the *Times* and patted his gouty leg, spread out on the footstool rest, and talked it over between the leaders (the gouty leg, not the *Times*.) She wound it round her throat several times rather tightly, and then drew a sort of hooded end of it over her hat, and sat like that for more than a *mauvais quart-d' heure*, raving against the fish in the river, the fish in the sea and the fish in the shops—all fish, dead and alive.

We listened. I had folded my rod complacently. I had had, it was true, no sport; but my rod was left to me. Selina, by way of making us all a good cup of tea, had spilt the paraffin oil over those sweet little pink sugared caked stuck around with almonds that I delight in, and was pretending nothing had happened. I said something about pouring oil on troubled waters but not paraffin oil whereupon that artful Selina said my daintiness was a perfect curse; had never eaten a bit of cold meat from my babyhood upwards, and I was absurd.

Don't tell Champie I don't like cold meat," and she replied;

"Why, what, pray, have you got to do with the Champion?" and then I drew the bambina out of my pocket—by the bye, I forgot to mention the bambina; it's a tiny guitar, made to carry in one's pocket, and take on water excursions or road excursions —and I said:

"Cut the sandwiches, Selina, dear, and Sabina and I will sing the gipsy chorus out of the *New Romanians*." Sabina Ann never can resist singing; she is the delight of all the "at home" people. She is to be relied on as always being what is called "in voice," and her invoices are cargoes of heartrending ditties.

"So we commenced to sing. Every now and then Selina's "bass" would thunder in, rich, full, suggestive of the profound matters of life. The accompaniment was just a few chords, and the drum, roll, and nails (Spanish style affair.)

GIPSY GIRL.

(From the "New Romanians.")

Rejoice in the light that comes at day
As the sun rises up, like a god at play;
He casts his beams in the gipsy's track,
He guides us onward, but never back.

Chorus

Zingara, Romany boy!
Zingara, Romany girl!
Sing away, dance away
Keep happy while you may.

Sing we all a merry song,
So the day shall ne'er be long;
The light that comes at eventide
Is sweet, and fair, and shall abide.

Chorus.—Zingara, &c,

Wild is the blood that flows in our veins;
For us great cities are full of pain;
We live in the breath of the wood and stream;
We should die if caged from the sun's glad beam.

Chorus.—Zingara, &c,

There is an echo just below Chertsey Bridge, a peculiarly strong one. The distant woods seem to take up the chorus, and the dying sun for one moment to linger and wonder at the mystery of human song.

"Keep happy while you may," sighed the soft, low-toned wind.

"Keep happy while you may," murmured the strong, deep current as it rushed onward.

"Keep happy while you may," repeated the weird voice of the echo.

Then did Selina suggest sandwiches, and, as she handed them, said it was not her fault that they were not "pork." That's Selina all over. Directly one gets into the realms of thought, she produces a pork sandwich!

We sat munching our sandwiches while the boat idly rocked up and down. It's my belief that we didn't fail of the picturesque, an effect easily enough attainable. Selina had her bearskin to rest against, and a wonderful cushion imported straight from "Roma," on which to lean her head. Sabina Ann had a tiger-skin (such a striped monster!) and, as for me, I always cling to one old tartan, and had twisted it about me in true Highland style. Tintoretto sat with her sphinx-like face looking outward and onward, her strange green eyes ablaze with light, every now and then she shook her grand silver collar and bells, as if to shake herself out of Catland. The three bouquets, too, were conspicuous enough at the prow; and the big scarlet umbrella looked for all the world like an old pensioner who had furled his colours.

"Selina, dear," I said, as I flung my crumbs to a swan (which had come sailing majestically up, as much as to say, "I'm a queen, but, as my subjects, I claim your crumbs") "do tell us how 'Champie' won the Diamonds. You were at Henley that year; you saw it all. Do tell us."

Selina took out her sketch-book, and rather aggravatingly began to fill in a sky, (She had been sketching Chertsey Bridge.) She continued leisurely to ply her pencil. Selina takes her own way and her own time, something like the "powers that be."

"Do, Selina," I reiterated; so at last she began to speak, throwing her right hand at an angle of forty-five, and her face filling with all the fire of proud recollection.

"The dark horse wins the day, and 'Champie' is the fastest sculler that ever horsed the river; but it was not from belief in his own powers that 'Champie' has held more boating honours in his hand at one time than any other man; for a more modest fellow than my brother never championed the Thames. I've heard little sparrow scullers come twittering up to him, and talk of their little pair-oar races in puddles and ponds as if they were world-renowned oars. Such tremendous airs have they given themselves! And I have seen 'Champie' listen' to them with unassumed kindly interest, till at last, my patience with these little' swelling worded boasters bursting all bounds, I've said, 'Are you aware of the giant sculler you are addressing?' And sometimes, to my amazement, they have known, and yet have ventured; and sometimes, equally to my amazement, they have not known, and yet have ventures. Henley was 'Champie's' maiden race; he had never raced before. For two months before the race came off he and his trainer were at Henley, and all I can tell you is that he trained just like a horse (only not with half so much consideration.) The sweating process (yes, talk of

sweating—that was sweating!) from six in the morning to nine at night. Walking, running, besides keeping two courses every day against the stop-watch. Still for all this there was nothing to attract much observation at Henley before the memorable day. The good folks of Henley watched the 'Kite'—a well-shaped funny that had just been launched on the northern waters—night after night as it was seen with its solitary occupant doing the course, while 'Joe' coached from the bank. They gathered—those well-seasoned boats to aquatic exploits—about their riverside, and observed with lazy, good-humoured interest all that went on, but they little thought the winner was before them. At last the memorable day arrived, and Henley—gay Henley was a fact. The July sun rose like a rejoicing giant in the heavens, and blazed his glances earthward. There was not a breath of air. Nature seemed to participate by being absolutely still. The river was a flower-garden, gay as Ascot. The lawn was crowded. Happy Selina, (that's me) was on it. The umpire's launch is at the starting-point; the drags are crowded; the house-boats form along terrace of beautifully appointed houses, like the barges at Oxford, only on a larger scale. The countless craft are being rapidly got into their places by the Thames police. So that the course may be cleared.

"Henley bridge is massed with heads. Radley boys and Eton boys greet their comrades and chaff unmercifully, after their wont. The Ishmaelitish strawberry sellers are making the air thick with their guttural voices; 'Fine strawberries! fresh strawberries!' The native men are on the water, and 'Bones' is having a rare time of it with fresh-made puns and humorous ditties. Scattered broadcast are bright bits of colour—flannels, gay straws, blazers distinctive of colleges, clubs, schools, light blue, dark blue, each colour as significant to boating men as the

degree of a parson to a 'Varsity graduate. There's a grand display of bare legs, both in the boats and on the banks. Our boating-men are pretty free and easy, and think little of shocking the susceptibilities of the over-particular. A gun is fired; the start has taken place, but nothing is seen. In a few seconds a surging mass on foot is running along the bank. Presently you hear the great roar of a multitude of voices, hoarse, long, continuous. It increases, it becomes deafening, and you, too, become deaf to the shouts, to the cries, to the mad enthusiasm of that enthusiastic throng in your own wild desire that 'your man' may win. On comes the crowd with convulsive upheavals, moving like one, and yet all strangely at variance, each shouting lustily the name of his man. Now the three boats are visible to our straining eyes. In one is the holder of the Diamonds; In another, a well-trying man, greatly conscious of his own success in the past, and still more conscious of success to come; in the third rises the dark head and broad shoulders of 'Champie,' the then novice. As they near the bend a great shout goes up, the shout of victory. I hear the name of 'Champie' ringing in the air, caught up by thousands, and eddying on and on. He is walking over the course with long, swinging, powerful stokes; he is sweeping over the water, his cherry-loured flag waving gaily in the nose of that racing craft. His opponents are nowhere. The gun again booms. The great race of Henley is over, and this was the beginning of a long series of triumphs for which our Champion is famous."

Selina stopped talking, and meditatively began to weigh anchor preliminary to our pulling up to Staines.

"Ah," she said, as she pulled in the rope and we were dragged up to the spot to which we were anchored, "it needs a lot of endurance to win a great race. Now then, Sabina Ann, hold on to my skirts, or I shall be

over-board. If it rains Tintoretto's and Montmorency's, I hope neither of you will move from our combined intention of sleeping one night in a boat, under that old tarpaulin cover!"

CHAPTER XII

TARPAULIN EXPERIENCES AND ETON BOYS

THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE who have always reminded me of what I believe is called "Chubb's patent lock," they are so absolutely certain of the made-up contents and well-organised plans arranged in their own safety chests; they are so convincingly proof against being broken in upon by those amiable thieves of our time known as our acquaintances, or those inner thieves known as our inclinations, both of which often upset calculations, and destroy plans of campaign. There is, I may as well say, nothing of the Chubb's patent lock about us three. A butterfly is capable of taking me clean away into Egypt; a sunless day, baited with a ton of fog, is capable of making Selina throw her enormous energies into a metaphorical waste-paper basket and literally give in, like a frost! and an underdone cutlet is capable of making Sabina Ann Pipkin's blood boil, with that particular boil, which boils up and over and away. Under these circumstances the reproach had more than once been thrown at us that we lacked ballast, and conveyed an impression of unreality, volatile, unstable, uncertain. Whenever this happened, Selina got hold of the family tree and talked of her great-grandmother Grace; and Sabina Ann of course, took poor Mr. Pipkin's gouty leg as her text, and waxed hideously eloquent over the thirty years' run in one leg that had gone on in his case, and, in fact among the whole tribe of legs from generation to generation. Rich gout (she called it) got into the family when the

keys of the City were handed over to old Jocosa Pipkin in the year Anno Domini 1657, and had maintained its position ever since.

"Did you say Jocosa Pipkin?" I had inserted gently.

"Yes," replied Sabina Ann. He had a women's name (old Jocosa), but he was a man and a woman-hater. There was a legend about a cap being set at him, but I never heard of its going beyond the set; anyhow, it never settled. Settlements Jocosa had a holy horror of. They knighted him," continued Sabina Ann. "He was Sir Jocosa Pipkin before he died. Who ever heard of gout without a title, unless it be 'poor' gout? And pity is title enough for that."

We were very fond of talking about our relations, we three; all our faults we set down to them, and all our virtues we set down to ourselves.

"Heavens!" said Selina one day, "look at my generosity! It's true I have never been able to give in my life; I never had the chance; but wouldn't I make my banker sit up if I had! The only cheque I've ever had is a check dress. I got it because I thought it 'might mean 'coming events casting shadows,' &c. The check wore out, and it never crossed it with another, never)!"

We enlivened our pull up to Staines with talk of all kinds. Sometimes our talk widened and deepened like the river, at it (our talk) became so navigable that we let the crafts of the old and new worlds go by. We got the unfathomable depths of chromic scales, the self-same scales that Alexander blamed Aristotle (was it Aristotle?) for revealing. We waxed Classic and Horatian; we sang of Helen and we boasted about that fair city, the city of Troy.

No place (if you can call it a place) like the river for talking; it loves you to talk, or to be silent, or to be gay. There is almost a sense of compassion, the sigh of a sad, yet acknowledged mastery, in the deep undercurrent which flows at the heart of the river, as

it listens and laps its gleaming idle fringes about the waiting banks; and draws the dead leaves into little eddying circles, to float out in fantastic wind-tossed combinations; and to chant, amid the whirl of waters and rush of tides, "We too, have lived!" Sweet, sad, brown leaves, moist with the breath of the ductile soil, which loves and uses you with unerring poise.

"Nothing will induce me to put up at Staines tonight," said Selina. "I'm in the mood to row on and on, to an enchanted castle, or an enchanted garden. We have been in touch with the old life of the Greeks, and I feel too mercurial and Hellenic altogether to moor our boat at respectable Staines. Let's go on till we get beyond Windsor—to Eton. Let us look up the Eton boys, my two chummies, dear old 'Tick and Tuck,' as we call them."

"Now, I never could stand a schoolboy," said Sabina Ann; "they are so rumbustical. Aren't they horrid, Phœbe? I am always—always afraid of them. They play football with one's feelings and cricket with one's nerves, and they are given to falling in love, too."

"It is, quite immaterial, to Phœbe and me," said Selina, taking the immediate upper hand, "whether you can stand them or they can stand you. I'm going to pull on to Eton, and Phœbe is going to steer us there."

"That's it, is it?" said Sabina Ann. "Very well if I am defeated in my purpose I won't be defeated in my charity. We had better pull away in earnest."

We flashed along past Staines, and after passing through the lock we felt the elevation of the water, much as if one had mounted a hill. Here the river becomes more and more lovely; the graceful serpentine course begins again, and you wind in and out, and bend about with delightful variation. Windsor Castle towered to the left, sombre, regal, monarchical. Turreted old red-brick Eton (the nursery of our statesmen and the playground of our

lords) lay down below on the right. There is a little island on the Eton side, almost in the town. We looked at it, even hooked on, and discussed thoroughly whether we would "tarpaulin" there for the night.

Sabina Ann said it was too conspicuous—she shrank from notoriety. It was all very well for Selina, who liked it. No, no! We must moor in some retired spot, well out of the way. She was so decided that neither Selina nor I liked to dispute the matter. We had learned what everybody must learn, that to yield is the most efficient weapon in the hands of the determined. Yield, and get your way! Sabina Ann said if we didn't take care we should be talked about, and she said she had a perfect horror of that. Tarpaulin is one thing, your window-blind and closed curtains and belocked door another. Selina and I were so headlong (whatever that is.) She had: never been talked about *yet*; and she hoped she should so, map out her course across the tempestuous sea of life to avoid the eye of gossip and the tooth of the slanderer. "I am bound for Monkey Island," said Selina suddenly.

That's Selina all over! She give in, or appears to give in, and then suddenly bursts upon you with a "Monkey Island and carries you a long way on to it before you can count your coppers or calculate your previous engagements.

So to Monkey Island we made our way. Got out of our boat, walked on to the island, discovered it was not swampy, appropriated it with the independent appropriating air of landlords, selected our position, knowing we were likely to be alone in our glory, and then pulled off again to the hospitable-looking Etonian boat-house, and sprang ashore to look up our topped boy.

"Jam it, my boys, while you may," said Selina in a stage whisper to me; "tart it while you can. Jam is a

non-conductor, sweet, frightfully Sweet, but not brilliant."

Suddenly, above the hum of voices, rose the tones of a shrill expostulation from somewhere.

"No, Marquis; not another tart. No more tick for you. I only heard from your ma this morning; 'she says on no account am I to supply you with tick."

"Sarah, you beast, you wretch, you old hag" rang out a voice, in proud remonstrance. "I'll have another of those ices or I'll—I'll—I'll—"

"You shall, my sweet old Tick." Selina had flown up to the rescue, and her arm was affectionately flung round the neck of one of the most charming-looking of, small boys; an exotic; in appearance, small-featured, fair, haughty. Tuck, the bosom friend of the little Marquis was standing by silent and subdued. It was terrible to witness this discussing collapse of those tributary rivers whose fount is jam and whose source is tick.

Sabina got hold of the arm of Tuck and escorted him to a table, which we soon loaded up with the fruits of a rapid glance around (*The Fruits of Reserge*, as an author once proudly informed me was the title of his book.) The heart of the little Marquis was angry and sore; sensitive and stung, it took us some time to bring him round. Between the bites we heard language uncomplimentary (if Parliamentary) blowing Sarah abaft. "Hag!"—munch, munch—"Beast!"—munch, munch—"Hag!"—bolt, bolt. The irate little Marquis was not only puffed up but puffed out. "Forgive Sarah" said Selina; "she forgot herself."

"Not she," said Tuck, who was very fat boy, and supposed to be the best hand known with a bolster, if only he could stir the spirit of his distinguished little chum to go in for a good old skin-your-nose encounter.

"I'd take her memory off her and give her back the leavings, old Marmalady!"

"I wish I could construe her into a monument of jam and hoist her into your rooms, Tickie," said Selina, "and there let you punish her by taking your degree off her somehow. Taking her by degrees—that sort of thing."

"May she never disagree with either of you two again," said Sabina Ann solemnly. "Now let's get to our boat." Tick and Tuck were very charmed over our exploits. They listened to all we had to tell them with that delightful freshness of interest which belongs to boy-life, and when we drew off again to Monkey Island, Tick and Tuck were standing arm-in-arm, humming, "For he's a jolly good fellow." I'm certain I saw Selina push something that crackled into the hand of Tick, so I concluded the jolly good fellow," applied to her. I think it was Sabina who ventured the remark, as we made our boat fast: "Do either of you regret the decision to sleep in the boat?" and I think it was Selina who emphatically denied that she had ever regretted any single decision at which she had arrived, and talked about the nice discrimination of her brain and the neat response of her heart.

CHAPTER XIII

MONKEY ISLAND AND THE FRYING-PAN

"RIG UP THE CHINESE LANTERNS and hand me the frying pan."

Our boat was cosily moored, and we had affixed our lanterns, so that they presented quite a brilliant appearance. We had put up our towing-mast, and arranged a rope to go from bow to stern. On this rope we hung our lanterns. Selina said it was fairyland; and then she grew quite sentimental, and murmured something about "wands, and princes, and Cinderellas."

"Hand me the frying-pan," said Sabina Ann, quite severely, "and don't talk nonsense about princes! Did you bring the sausages, Phœbe?" (This to me.)

"The what?" I said, fixing my *pince-nez*.

"The sausages," reiterated Sabina. "I'm going to fry them."

The fire was laid on our island, and we had gathered round it. Our boat was but a few paces from us, a brilliant spot of colour on the dark mysterious waters. It was a still night. The moon had risen blood-red, and hung in trance-like dreamings over the glorious pile of massive masonry which makes Windsor Castle so truly Royal. The star-worlds were rapidly taking their accustomed or unaccustomed places (who knows? I don't) in the unfathomable spaces which form their setting. Over all above and all below there brooded that profound silence which is the fullest expression of those unutterable thoughts that confound the wisdom of man and exalt the foolishness of babes—the silence of supernatural forces.

Night is beautiful, perhaps more beautiful than day; for night bears something on her folded wings that the glad day knows not. Night brings that best pean of praise, rest, and throws the strange mantlings of her unimagined loveliness over the fierce sorrows of her storm-tossed child, our world.

"Now, Phœbe Winter, the stars are above and the frying-pan's below; will you please butter the pan while I gather a few more sticks? I have no intention of doing more than my honest share of work. Selina is doing the sentimental, and you are doing philosophy, or theosophy, or some other 'osophy. Much good it does you! Butter that frying-pan, if you please, and remember that all thought means, for the most part, 'Out of the frying-pan into the fire!'"

"How many pounds of butter do you desire me to butter the frying-pan with, Sabina Ann Pipkin?" I

said stiffly. "I suppose the frying-pan is like some of our acquaintances—nothing to be done with them without pounds of butter, eh?"

"Ay, ay, ay!" said Sabina. "Now, Phoebe, you can dance round the frying-pan. Throw in the sausages—a sausage should be done with dash—it is compounded of so many nationalities, I'm told, that—that——"

"It's Cambridge," I said; "the Light Blue has it. Cambridge has turned out some excellent mathematicians, also some excellent sausages. Oxford has her mixture, but no sausages,"

Only dons," said Selina. "I had a proposal from an Oxford don, by-the-bye, but I couldn't——"

"Tell that to the sausages later on," said Sabina Ann. "Phœbe and I are too vulgarly hungry to hear about proposals. Look out Phœbe! What's that spluttering? Look out! Hi! Hi."

"Disgusting things!" I said, as I peered into the frying-pan; "they are bursting, I believe; cracking up all over"

"Popping like the Oxford don," said Sabina Ann who was laughing to suffocation. "O, Phœbe what a nose that sausage to the left has! Don't ask me to participate in the feast, I really can't! The things are rolling up into balls! take them off the fire! Quick! quick quick!"

Pop—burst—jump! Don't ask me where those sausages went. For all I know, they may have bloomed out into human sausages, and be walking about on "Monkey Island" to this day. All I know is that they vanished; and when we all three looked into the frying pan there was a sound as of grease that wept and butter that apologised—nothing more. Sabina went off, and sat under a diminutive willow. She said she thought she was in duty bound to cut me—I deserved it. Thrift was evidently an unknown

virtue in me, She declined to have anything further to do with the frying-pan.

"Selina's doing a cutlet," I said. "Hold up, Sabina."

"More work," said Sabina— more spluttering, and nothing to show for it. The cutlets will go off as the sausages did, mark my words."

"Selina is an experienced hand at it," I said. "Look at her way with that frying-pan. Even utensils know whom to obey."

Selina stood over that gipsy fire for fully twenty minutes. The flames leapt up, and every now and then her face stood out like a picture in an aureole of fire. Handsome, strong, and yet oddly soft withal. There is something about an English girl in the full development of young womanhood that you will beat or match in no living or dead nation. I mean the girl who has been brought up among horse, dogs, and sport of every kind, the life of which flows away to them from fathers and mothers who have lived on their own piece of land from generation to generation. Selina would trudge over turned-up fields, at the side of her brother, with his gun and terriers, carrying the bag with the pink-eyed, soft-furred ferrets. She could handle them as warily as any poacher, and place them to the mouth of the hole, with its innumerable branching-out galleries and staterooms, where "life among the rabbits" is carried on so successfully, and watch for the "bolt" of poor handicapped bunny; and see Dodger, Gripper, and Smiler's dashing onslaught, with that frank, cheery, unembarrassed smile which has been handed on to her from her hunting, shooting, boating, racing progenitors.

Nothing, somehow, looked absurd in the hands of Selina; even a frying-pan took its cue from her, and behaved itself seemly, like charity.

We gathered round at last and ate our cutlets, and vowed we had never tasted anything so perfectly cooked, and Selina told us all about the don's

proposal. She said it was in Latin verses, and she had treated it as a bit of poetical license, and he had come round, she called it, to see her in a skull-cap, with glove-mittens, and absolute intentions, which she had had to put down decisively. He had been most pertinacious—said he had nothing but a housekeeper to look after him, and she had begun to rule over him—*tandem fit surculus arbor*—and that he was convinced that in matrimony, as in all things, *via trita via tuta*; and after profound consideration, and indeed many anxious and even sleepless nights, he had decided *non sibi sed patriæ*.

“Ho, ho, ho!” said Sabina, sniffing up the air, a horrid way she certainly has when going to make game of anything. “Going to marry from patriotic sentiments! What a Spartan; Just tell us how you refused him, and then let us go to bed—I mean boat.”

“In Latin, of course,” said Selina. I just wrote on a slip of paper, *‘Ne sutor ultra crepidam,’* which freely rendered, as I need hardly tell you, will pass for this dog-English: ‘Let not the don go beyond his book.’ Now to the boat.

CHAPTER XIV

GLORIANA ON HER BARGE

WE BLEW OUT THE CHINESE lanterns. We did it regretfully; it was like blowing out a row of brilliant personages, “It invariably comes to the exaltation of the useful before the beautiful,” said Sabina Ann, as she arranged the wick of a riding-lamp. Then Selina and she commenced to fix up the tarpaulin quite admirably. The towing-mast figured in the middle of it; and it was buttoned over in a secretive hide-your-head style, and it was buttoned over in a secretive hide-your-head style.

Neither old nor young curiosity could peer in upon us. As far as complete privacy was required, it was secured. Sabina and Selina were in positive raptures. They declared that nothing could be more perfectly charming. Sabina began to make quite an elaborate arrangement for the night. She curled her hair, for instance, with a set of frightful pins, and put on a lamb's-wool dressing-gown, and a cloak lined with Russian sable on the top of that; and on her head a warm woollen cap with a long tail, such as children wear and look picturesque enough in. She drew a pair of overalls over her feet, and flung down a mass of cushions and rugs and eiderdown quilts, and got towards the stern, and bade us a lively good-night. Selina and I had watched her in silence.

"God helps those who help themselves, I know," said Selina; "but really is there a pillow, or an eiderdown or a rug left for us?"

Sabina Ann made no answer; a peculiar sound emanated from the locality where she had located herself. Ladies don't snore, so it couldn't have been that. It must have been Tintoretto, who, rather selfishly (dear pet), had curled herself up in a ball close to Sabina, who, to my certain knowledge, hates her.

Selina now began to make her nocturnal boating arrangements—more original than Sabina's, and less "trollopy." She got into a complete bearskin costume, decidedly smart, and, as far as I could see in the forlorn light, becoming. She topped it all with a little fur cap, which she drew over her ears, and then she betook herself to the middle of the boat, and rolled herself in her fair remaining share of rugs. The bow of the boat was left to me, but I was by far too wide awake to dream of sleep. No, no! I would watch with the stars and stare about with the moon; but sleep like an ordinary mortal—not I!

Sabina Ann lifted her head up once, and looked at me and said: "It's a comfort to know we have a watch-dog in Phœbe;" and Selina murmured (in her sleep, I suppose): "If anything happens give me a shake." It was my own wish, of course, to take up the position in which I found myself; but I could not help noticing how we are treated exactly as we treat ourselves. After all, I was a self-elected martyr, so they were safe in using me.

We all know how everything, to use a common expression, sounds at night in our houses: stairs creak, and furniture cracks, and a thousand noises known only to the night strike on the ear, that is doubly alive in the stillness. On the river, there was only the idle lapping of the tide as it washed the banks with the ripple of the river, not the strong under-note that marks the slightest whisper of the sea. The wind scarcely stirred the trees, now and then I could hear a slight loving shake of the tree-tops, as if the wind had caught the boughs in play, and laughed out some joyous little love-speech, as it swept over them in waves on waves.

It was such a sultry night; I lifted the tarpaulin at the side nearest to me, and watched for long the startling splendours of Nature's ceaseless activity: the shadows moving ever onwards, like thoughts in swiftest chase of one another; the loving tread of those phantom feet that glide across the glistening fields, and hurry with an ever-recurring fleetness, in massive columns, over the waiting woods and the listening hills; the stars gazing downwards, and searching out the mystery of the river; and the long reed-like grasses nodding at them, with weird music and strange dream-like wavings. Now and then the hoarse croak of a frog blended with the chirrup of a grasshopper; and the dull movement of bats' wings, whirling with witch-like and fantastic flappings,—born of some blind hope, linked the animate to the

inanimate, and gave one a less remote feeling. A distant clock, with a note like an abbey bell, slowly, solemnly, warningly, began to chime the full time. I know nothing more strangely, sweetly sad than: the deep chimes of some of our great clocks. One, two, three! I drew my sables about me. At three the night begins to creep away, with, it has often seemed to me, an accent of regret.

Imperious, masterful day is, like some brilliant optimist beside the silent negatives of night. I was about to close the tarpaulin, and “do” as Sabina and Selina, when the sound of voices and the measure of horses’ hoof on the towing path arrested me.

“Hold hard, Glorina! Darn’d if I don’t believe as I shall catch it about here! It was bound to go in the stream about as far as this. Hold hard, Glorina! Darn the gal! what beest peerin’ at? Don’t see the corpse, do ye?”

“Hisht, Josiah! hisht!”

“Hisht! I’ll ‘hisht’ your impudence, ungrateful hussy! As I fished ye up from being food for the fish, I’ll fish ye down to be food for ’em agin, if ye don’t dang up yer flamer”—*Anglice* “tongue.”

Cautiously I lifted the tarpaulin a few inches wider, and the moon, which was riding high, struck her coldest beams downwards on a barge, evidently loaded up with coals. Two figures were thrown forward in bold relief against the paling sky and the dark rushing waters: that of a powerfully-built man, who held something that looked like a long rope, with four hooks, in his hands; and that of a girl, slim and tall, with a handkerchief twisted over a tangled mass of hair. I could see that the girl was handsome. Her profile was finely worked up, but the whole expression of her personality struck me with the force of a revelation, It was conveyed in her entire bodily presence, for the light was not strong enough for me to be able to define or localise the seat of her scorn, her hatred, or her defiance. Wild, untamed, yet

owning to the brute force that subjected her—as the dog cowers to the master’s lash—this waif of the river rose up before me, and, like the flash of inspiration from the realms of some human *Inferno*, conveyed in an instant the hideousness of her links, wrought in the iron of repulsion and the clay of desire, to that ruthless monster, with his “drag” and his oaths.

“Hisht, Josiah! Josiah hisht!” The *timbre* of that girl’s voice is in my ears yet. High, impelling, it seemed to come from regions where, perchance, lost souls cry out to their tormentors, and bid them desist from their plaguing desire to make each sin on one common level, like prisoners, who for varying sins are all cast headlong into one indiscriminate ward.

The thin yet perfectly outlined form of the girl was poised over the black rotting-looking sides of the barge in an attitude of expectation, eager, silent, yet a silence alive with forces working visibly, outwardly within her bodily presence. Her hands were flung high above her head, and then folded with an unconscious dramatic intensity, which many a celebrity in the dynamitic world would have coveted. What did she see or hear beneath or upon those silent waters? Is there speech in the uninhabited body? Does the soul, clothed with its astral effulgence, hang tremulously over the scene of its shame or its agony? “Darn you, Gloriana! Then you have tracked it, like ’em bloodhounds! WH give you puppy-pie after this, my gal; you were worth baitin’, after all, how many does that make as, taking on ’em by the gross, you’ve cotched me—them dead ’uns on the Surrey shore and them on this side?”

All the time the man spoke Gloriana stood as if transfixed. She was the divining-rod in his hand; she was the source of his gain and the slave of his whims; for even a bargee can have his whims, slung on his oaths, like many a master of his pack of hounds, human and canine. How thankful was I that our boat

was moored, so that I could see without being seen!
– Not for worlds would I have missed this nether-side of life.

Now an operation commenced which froze my blood, and yet seemed to give me two senses to every one possessed before. I felt myself pass, as it were, into realistic action with Gloriana and her partner; I seemed to assist at the horrible *séance* of the dead now held between them.

Something rose, then sank, like a dead weight. The great muscled arm of the man holding that gruesome rope was prodding the waters. Gloriana had withdrawn to the rough seat slung across the coals. She sat high on her throne, and looked down with scorn, loathing, triumph, and some inner consciousness yet underlying these grosser passions. A creature formed (I felt it) for good and noble ends, yet caught by the cruel hooks affixed to the dead-weight ropes of no opportunity.

She was facing me now. The march of clouds overhead formed a superb background. Given ease of circumstance; given the chances open to any ordinary-going girl—here was a face and a form which, even in its immaturity, might have vied with those old-world beauties that were the boast and the toast of England when Gainsborough painted his beautiful Duchess. Gloriana on her barge was a queen of beauty in a sea of foregone conclusions. The man went on with his prodding. Gloriana had given him the clue, and evidently she was never wrong in her divinations. As he prodded he swore with (paradoxical as it sounds) an almost religious fervour. The *répertoire* was not brilliant; the same ground was traversed to and fro. Few in number are the words of the common people; but for virile force those oaths might have leapt from the mouth of some great Inferno Diavolo, and certainly convinced one that, as

a fusee lights a cigar, so an oath lights a man's spiritual destination.

Poised on her coal heap, the girl listened with level-knitted brows, and dark broodings which might break away into a very genius of frenzy.

At last the man was silent; the oaths ceased; he was dragging up "something" which clutched, stark, stiff, at those terrible hooks. He was hoisting up dead body. I saw him raise his hand warningly to the girl, then beckon. She appeared not to notice, but looked out towards the east, as if it held some day-star. He beckoned again. The man was smiling; yes I could see contortions and muscular skin-twitchings, which meant pleasure. He was clutching at the dead man's arm; he was hoisting him with the force of greed (and no force like it) into the barge. For one instant I saw the dead man's face; it was calm, with the strength Death's one victory; it was stern, with the sternness of a destiny worked out by man's own will; it was awful, with the threefold awfulness of triune murder—body, soul, and spirit.

For one moment I cowered and shrank before this mystery of life, then redoubled my eager observation. The man was, or had been, or is, evidently (ah, the complications that beset us when we would give the dead the honour due unto their names! a gentleman. He was well dressed. Josiah had not smiled for nothing. Now commenced a disgusting operation. Josiah began to rifle the body. He took the nerveless hand and pulled rings from the stiffened fingers; tore them off, and paused for one hideous moment to leer at Gloriana, and even offered to put them on her "darn'd knuckles," as he called her hand. He examined the dead man's pockets, turned them inside out, and took various sums off him; gold, silver, and coppers (the coppers he flung into Gloriana's lap with another leer.) She neither regarded them, nor him, nor the dead man; her work

was over (discovering by divination.) He took his papers and folded them into a red handkerchief (one of those gaudy things beloved of the bargee genus), and thrust then into his rough blue jersey. Then his task seemed done. He began to whistle; he turned the dead man over, so that he lay face upward; and he stood over him for full a minute staring—whether with a view to possible future complications, I can't tell.

"Here, Gloriana," he said after this silent investigation. "Come and kiss him; he's a darn'd aristocrat, and yer like 'em. Yer kiss him; I ain't jealous on 'em dead or alive. I'm going to weight him in a jiffy. Look alive! He won't rise no more, if Josiah can help to lay he."

To my surprise Gloriana left her seat; she moved easily across the barge with the ease born of proportion—her head held high, too, as if accustomed to carrying water-pots (no pose of the head better taught)—and she stooped down and kissed the dead man with the tenderness of a mother. She passed her hands across the dank hair, and she closed, or endeavoured to close, those staring eyes. She bent over him and examined each feature with a scrutiny full of unutterable sadness; then she turned away without a word, and once more took her seat, and sank into her trance-like meditations, looking always eastward. Josiah laughed. How he laughed! Hoarse, gibing, continuous, guttural—the chuckle of devilment worked into the half-intelligence and whole-cunning of demi-semi-man.

Then he lugged two great lead weights from the back of the barge; he secured them to the dead man's feet, and let each foot fall with its own dull weight as he affixed his load. Then he seized that awful unresisting mass of silent humanity in his great brawny arms, black with coal-dust and bristling with sinewy strength, and hoisted the dead man upward

with one great convulsive movement; and, with an outward throw, combined of repulsion, indifference, and desire to be rid of it, he flung it from him into the waiting omnivorous waters, which circled, and eddied and gurgled, and then sank back into the silence of rivers and sea which wait to give up their dead.

Josiah took out a small clay pipe, struck a match and lighted it; he flung himself along a seat, and began to count his gold. The horses on the towing-path moved on with weary painstaking obedience; the barge glided onward like a black swan on the silent waters and Gloriana sat still and erect on her pile of coal, so they passed.

After this sleep was impossible. It was true I would not for worlds have missed the horrible spectacle I had just witnessed. I knew it to be a common enough occurrence on some parts of the river—to wit, on the Surrey shore—but near stately Windsor, close to the boy life of Eton, it was rare, strange as truth itself.

I watched for the day, as we count day, longingly, I glanced with absolute disgust at the sleeping beauties before me. How could they sleep with such superlative indifference?

The sun gradually began to rise; first the faint pink glow; then the deepening impress of the awakening flush of the sun's eternal youth; then the rolling backward of countless little red-tipped clouds; and then the mighty god, shaking off the last dream of night, and rising with the shout of victory to shower health and blessing on king and peasant, blade of grass and rounded pebble. Effulgent, glorious sun! I decided to wake those two lying in such deep indifference to all below and all above. It was six o'clock. We would pull away from these waters which held so ghastly a secret, and further up, in some retired nook, take three glorious "headers." "Selina!" I said, going up to her and shaking her violently; "the

Hereditary, Grand Ducal has come to breakfast. Get up and receive him at once."

"Sabina Ann!" I said, giving her also a terrific shake; "the Calendar is on the bank opposite, and has cut off his beard!"

"Heavens!" said Sabina. "Without consulting me! Why, he will be perfectly hideous! He's got a runaway chin!" (How had she discovered it?)

CHAPTER XV

THE DUCAL'S LAUNCH TURNS UP AND SELINA GOES QUITE MAD

WE BATHED IN A CHARMING bend of the river almost a mile beyond Windsor, Not a creature was stirring, so we did it with delightful impunity. The sun had already warmed the stretch of water in which we disported ourselves; its slanting graceful beams had turned the bend in to a lakelet of molten gold. Have you not often noticed how lovely the effect of light and shade is on the river? Here is a patch of gold set in a steel-grey frame. Selina's and my costumes were models of aquatic dress. I had brought mine from Ostend the previous year, and Selina had sincerely flattered me by copying it. Sabina's, on the contrary, was the *fen de siècle*; it was an awful arrangement, and she was so conceited about it, too; swaggered before she took her header off the boat. We had expected to crush her with our grandeur, but it was quite the other way about. She rose above that dreadful old bathing-costume, and triumphed like old Socrates, or Diogenes, in his tub (I know it was one of them; I'm indifferent which.) Selina is like a duck in the water; she disappears for minutes together; comes up again; lies flat on her back and asks you to tickle her nose with a straw! Swims out with majestic strokes, disappears suddenly, comes out other end. Sabina, on the other hand is tame,

miserably tame, and looks so silly, so silly, so sickeningly silly, with her arms always waving about, and her mouth invariably full of water and trying to talk in the middle of it all—as a rule, too, about Schopenhauer, of all people. She always carries this pessimistic philosopher into the water with her (metaphorically, of course) She takes a dip, comes up, with a streak of hair wandering across her nose, and begins:

“How cleverly Schopenhauer talked about love! didn’t he, Phœbe?”

“The people who talk the most about it know the least, as a rule, Sabina. Schopenhauer knew nothing at all about it.”

Then I swim away, pursued by Sabina, who makes an awful clutch at me, which is all very well on land, but frightening in the water, where one feels like a porcupine. ;

“Schopenhauer said we willed one another; didn’t he, Phœbe?”

“I beg of you, Sabina Ann, never to mention the name of that pernicious philosopher to me again. If you have willed the Calendar, will him, beard him, marry him; but I decline to discuss the philosophy of Schopenhauer when taking my morning tub, Make room if you please”—brandishing my arms.

Then does Sabina go up and down like a cork without a screw, a perfect idiot, and looking as if she is keeping “a bit to herself”—a way she has, and a very exasperating way too. What that “bit to herself” is, I have never found out; it’s there, I am sure of it. I have seen her smile at that “bit to herself,” glance coyly at it, wander out of doors (as a rule, into the garden) with: it; occasionally retire to her bedroom with it. Ah, that “bit to herself!” Once I faced her with it.

In Heaven’s name, Sabina, what is it? Don’t look like that. Live openly, as Comte advised us all. I dare you

to keep that disgusting "bit" to yourself any longer: It's no good."

Sabina then looks worse than ever. Sly Gentile, sly Montmorency! Ah, Sabina is not the only humanised Tintoretto who keeps "a bit to: herself."

We did enjoy our breakfast "considerable some" after that swim. We got out the frying-pan again and copied "George" (I think it was "George") to a T. Frizzle, frizzle, frizzle. Yes, the frying-pan has its frizzle as well as Sabina Ann. We also (I must not forget to mention) made very elaborate toilette. We had silk jerseys of all colours with us, and as long as one's body-part looks nice one can make shift on the river with a skirt of serge very well. Selina's jersey was pale pink silk; and as her skin is a pale—very pale—saffron (Irish she calls it) and her eyes intensely dark, with heaps of light brown hair, she looked uncommonly well in it. Selina, too, has a decidedly pretty nose and a ductile mouth, I have always extremely admired her. She is, too, so perfectly unconscious of her good looks. "Law! what pretty birds 'em pay-hens are up at Norris Castle! 'Law! don't they think something of themselves, with their tails stuck out! But there, their feet spoils 'em!"

Thus spoke a yokel the other day, and pointed a moral at all conceit. "Law! their vanity spoils 'em," may be said of many.

Breakfast over, we began to discuss what our plan for the day should be. *L'homme propose, mais Dieu dispose.*

We were in the full tilt of hot argument when the vibratory motion of a steam-launch came stealthily upon us, after the fashion of such creatures.

"Mashallah!" said Selina, with a rapid turn of her head; "its the Ducal—it is, really. He is standing on the deck. Who could mistake him? Look, Sabina! Look, Phœbe! he is staring through his field-glass at us! He is, really!"

Selina's excitement was considerable; she moved to the prow, where the now faded bouquets were yet laid, lank and lorn; and, seizing one of them, absolutely began to brandish it at his Highness.

"I shall not expostulate, Selina," I said, but wait the turn of events."

"The turn of the tide you mean," said Selina, who was now as pink as dawn. "He is looking for us, of course—don't you think I know?—and he will say he is confounded to see us. Don't you think I hear him?"

"Selina, if you don't sit down and give over with that bouquet I shall faint," said Sabina; "it's so conspicuous of you. Such an undignified proceeding. Why, the man will think you are—well—well—well—as Schopenhauer says—"

"Just as I thought," said Selina, with a gratified smile; "he has stopped the launch, and is evidently coming after us. Evidently—yes, he is coming—now, Sabina, now, Phœbe; he is coming! *I came, I saw, I conquered.*"

Selina had scrambled to her seat, and had flung herself back on to her cushions with quite an imposing *ensemble*. Nobody could have believed that a moment ago she had been waving that bouquet as a little school-girl waves her handkerchief at an excursion train. There are a hundred Selinas; she is never twice the same, and her actions appear to be animated by volitions beyond her absolute control; impulsive as a child one moment, and studied as the veriest *mondaine* at another.

The launch was now alongside, and, yes, it was indeed the "Hereditary Grand Ducal" who was clutching at the side of the launch, and bowing with a succession of Germanical bobs, like commas after a series of adjectives.

"The aquatic Fräuleins! What have I done that Heaven should be so kind? It is too good to be true, and too true to be evil! Ladies, am I dreaming? The authors

are always dreamers. Shake me fair ladies, if I dream! I little thought, when I started from Sunbury late last night, I should end—”

“Ah!” said Sabina Ann, “don’t say it your Highness; please don’t ever and never use such a word.” (Sabina Ann was veiling her sarcasm under the most solicitous of tones.) Her fine black eyes were careering over the Ducal’s personality. O, those eyes! I wanted him to hate Sabina; it was Selina he was attracted by; and yet with her theories and her *camaraderies* and her magnetisms she was a match for Selina any day! There is Fate, blind, deaf, and dumb; there is Destiny, strong, curtain, sweeping; there is Lot; the last lies in your lap and is disposed of by the higher powers. Contend with Fate it looks at you with eyes which are wall-blind. Fate is your Destiny: it will sweep you along on its strong undercurrents, and hurl you into the weirs which are ready at hand. Wait for your Lot: it is strong as the breath of spring, sweet as the air of summer, glad as the break of day!

“I have a note-book always at hand,” said the Ducal. “I shall possess myself of wise, witty and tender sayings of the fair lady scullers! I shall absorb them into books. We authors live to write, and, when we are weary of that, to—” he looked about for his word perhaps it came up from the river—I certainly think I heard him say “love;” if so, it was audaciously bold. But then wooers should be bold. We women like it when it’s backed up with steam-launches and titles and châteaux, and more especially— yes, more especially—when it has nothing but that everything charm!

While he talked I observed him with a more discriminating eye than previously. My description outward envelope was true; but I saw now that he really possessed mind, just as Selina had said, and a certain natural spontaneity of manner which

proceeded from a better source, after all, than the best of possible breeding (if that was his)—from the heart. He had a gentle heart; he was kind! It sounds so easy; but ah! is it not very difficult? The polished weapon sheathed in the best of manner, too often knows it not, and in the midst of its elegant thrusts and graceful welcomes tilts the point of its blade just here and there; and so, in the midst of your admiration, you wonder why you feel sad! No heart! No soul! A polished beast after all,

“How’s the cat?” he said, looking with quite a tender little glance at Tintoretto. Even a cat has no claws when folks are in the first stages of love; when it is universal and only secretly local; and, in fine, when it is doing the agreeable all round. It gets selfish enough later on at stage two, when it fires a hateful glance at every intruder on its *deux-à-deux* and *tête-à-tête* conferences; and makes outsiders almost wonder how anybody had the audacity to bring them into the world, considering these terrible lovers take up all the rooms in the world, and make everybody else feel awkward, even apologetic, except themselves.

“Yes,” said he, after a long pause, during which time I am certain he had been elaborating some plan, “that is a beautiful cat.”

“She is not without style,” I said; “which cannot be hazarded of every cat. Tintoretto has seen a great deal—some lions in her day and some mice in her generation!”

“Has she ever seen a Barzois?” said the Ducal suddenly.

“Hundreds,” said Selina audaciously. No dog so fashionable as the Barzois. “Tintoretto has scratched many a Russian and caught many a Tartar.”

Would she deign to come and scratch my Barzois near Sonning?” It would make Merlino so profoundly happy to be scratched by Tintoretto. Listen

frauleins.” (He turned his head to see if his men were anywhere near, but they were not; one was at the helm, one at the engines and a third in the bows.) “I am first of all an author, then a prince! My title is to me as dross—I care nothing about it; more, it is an elaborate bore; do you understand me? Let me repeat myself; my title means a succession of foundation-laying, antimacassar blessing, functional arrangement and public derangement business which my soul abhorreth. I have fled away from it. I shall flee, year by year, still further away from it. Am I an Alcibiades that people should flock to see me foundation-stone? and defile before me with their purses, because I am—what? Let them give their money to God, and their admiration—well, where it can be honestly accorded. Let them flock to their art galleries, and defile before the creations of genius. I have a genius for writing books, but no genius for laying foundation-stones. Do I make myself apparent to your combined intelligences? Now to continue, I have my estates in

Germany. One in the Black Forest (ah, that Black Forest! It was made for the sons of God, but when the sons of men come, the sons of God go); others in different parts; but here in England I have acquired a river-house. It is above Sonning. There I flee from functions; there I live the ideal life! May I in all simplicity and fair courtesy tow your boat as far as Sonning, and introduce Tintoretto to the Barzois Merlino? My sister lives with me, and others, many others.”

The Ducal’s hands were working in the same curious manner that I had previously noticed, clutching at the side of the launch. Great thinkers often show this nervous action of the hands. He was looking at all three of us, too, I declare, for each of us vowed we were equally invited.

"Which is Rhadamanthus, which is Æacus, and which is Minos, of you three?" Minos, remember, sends souls to the Isles of the Blest (feminise the gods please, for once, fair ladies.") Now did the Ducal really look at Selina; he could not look "spoony"—a queer but true enough old word, to be seen occasionally clothed realistically on the face of a learned old judge or a pompous old Bishop about to conduct to the hymeneal altar (for the third time, perhaps) some last, and perchance best, loved lady.

"Ulysses saw Minos sitting with a golden sceptre in Hades, waving souls to those Isles of the Blest," said Selina (who is always apt in quotation.) "I will be Minos. Tow us" (and she slightly bowed her head at the Ducal) "where you will. We are ready."

"The immortal 'Barkis is willing,' " said Sabina, with fiendish cruelty (I'm bound to say she half whispered it, but I heard her; I can't say whether that Hereditary thing at the side of the launch did; I hope not.) Go-betweens never come out well; even Lamb's valentines were tame, to my mind, in verse.

Again the bows, hops back, and delighted slight elevation of the hat. Again, that address to the heavens!

"What have I done that they should be so kind?" And now, order upon order in German, without any of Heine's descriptive horrors introduced into the really quite soft vocals; and the rope is being affixed to the Siren. The launch is gliding outward, and we are gliding after it. O Miss Pipkin! Rush away with your incubator; hatch what you can, from a chick to a plot. O Mr Pipkin! Order a curry, heated with a furnace of curry-powder, and let like cure like. O innumerable tongues of innumerable old women! Get out your teapots galore, and order your muffins and crumpets with all speed. Miss the river romance we won't, not if we miss your charity next time you come across those three audacious lady scullers!

The launch was unusually big; it had a charming upper deck over the main saloon. The awning, too, was of costly amber silk, with curtains of rich Venetian red; the striking combination of colour was thought-inspiring. This deck was carpeted with rugs from various Moslems. Flowers were growing in huge pots, and an author's table was conspicuously to the fore. Now that table was a contrast to everything else; it was of rough deal and three lead ink-pots looked like business. Thereon pens, too, of all kinds and shapes were arranged in rows. A little fat cork penholder amused me most, suggestive of corky hopes of many editions of the Hereditary books.

I anticipate however, for we did not inspect the launch for some time after we started. No; we were flung back in delightful in our boat, and just rushing along with the lovely fleetness of all water-driving that is carried on by steam, It's wonderful how easily we adapt ourselves to ease after labour. The fag at the sculls, the anxiety of steering: how had we ever accomplished them? We reclined on our cushions with folded hands, and rushed onward without a sigh backward.

"He will ask us on board by and by," said Selina; "he will pluck up heart of grace in the rush and tumble of a weir or the dead calm of a lock. What says Phœbe? what says Sabina?"

"Yes to everything: as far as I am concerned. I'm not going to wrap myself in an eternal negative. It's been ably pointed out lately by brilliant politician, that it's a losing game. We must tumble up and say 'yes' as many times day as we can."

"Remember," said Sabina a little sententiously, "that if 'No' shuts its door, 'Yes' never at best is permitted to so much as have a door to close. There's a medium in all things."

"Mediums are born pancakes," I said—"so flat."

His Highness sat facing us on deck, smoking an enormous cheroot stuck in an enormous amber cigar-holder.

"That's an encyclopædial head of his," said Selina, who was regarding him attentively; "he has a wide, fertile, ready mind. Imagine his prowess in following us up stream like this! *I shall be very proud of him.*" She looked across wickedly at Sabina, who was gazing hard into the river, as if she saw but the deep unknown beauty prefigured there. At this thrust, however, she raised her head and looked across at Selina whimsically, then burst out laughing. It was like a little crisis.

"Ah, Selina, don't snub Phœbe and me when you have a Hereditary husband—always supposing the rapid conclusions at which you never fail to arrive, and hardly ever fail to find wrong, should for once prove right."

"Clasp hands, true friends and tried," said Selina—"clasp hands."

The silent and observant figure on deck, in the midst of his grandeur, must have seen that hand-clasping, and wondered; for he Sot up and addressed us. Then he had the steam shut off, and at last we could hear his wish.

"Do come on board; I am so dull. Take compassion on me. I, too, have a hand-clasping mind."

"He might as well have done it at the first," said Selina meditatively.

Then we scrambled on board, ably assisted by his Highness.

"Come into the saloon," he said. "I'll have the band in a few minutes on deck."

Exclamations of admiration burst from my delighted lips when I saw the saloon. To those like myself who are passionately attracted by colour (which is melody in prose) it was furnished to perfection. Pontifically superb, the brilliant scarlet draperies, sent one in

imagination straight away to "Roma" and the presence of the Pope. Soft white flowers floated like a diaphanous cloud in clusters here and there, and broke all hard lines.

"Xenia, my sister did all this," said the Grand Duke. I go in for deal tables and lead inkpots. As you would see in my workshop, where I create ideals. Xenia has an imperial mind. She has given me up as a pure Socialist."

After this the band began to play. It consisted of five men with stringed instruments. Melody succeeded melody; the flowers seemed to redouble their fragrance, the sun beat down on the earth in yet greater fervency. Worn out with a sleepless night, I flung myself into an American lounge, and gave myself up to the dreamlike beauty of the scene. My eyes closed and I confess I fell asleep. Sabina had gone on deck. Selina and the Grand Duke were in the midst of a terrific discussion on some unsolved problem of the day—I forget what. I heard the Grand Duke say to Selina, "Your friend Miss Winter is tired," and I heard Selina say "Yes," and then I heard no more for some time.

At last, however, I felt that transitory state of half-wakefulness supervening on whole sleep, and I found myself placed in an exceedingly awkward predicament. I was the third in a *tête-à-tête* which was sacred and critical. If I spoke I might be a worse bore than if remained silent. I rapidly counted the cost of my actions and decided to remain perfectly quiescent.

"Love is a strange factor in our being, Fräulein Davidson, is it not? Sudden, it grips us altogether—body, soul, and spirit—or it is nothing."

"I hardly think it is ever nothing, your Highness, it is a little plague at the least, and a whole plague at the most."

"You speak as one versed in heart-studies; does this proceed from Intuition or an intimate acquaintance with many a personal experience?"

Selina smiled (through veiled eyes I beheld her.) She looked at her finely-shaped hands, which lay lightly clasped in her lap, they were heavily jewelled, Selina loves rings.

"Your Highness is somewhat personal."

"If am personal, believe me I am so with a good intent. I have never thought it worthwhile to be personal before. I am old to say that, am I not?"

"We are the best judges of our own years" said Selina, smiling (a shade foolishly, I thought.)

"Association with youth makes the old feel young. I wish I were in your century."

"Your Highness has the advantage of two centuries of wisdom, instead of one (perhaps), and wisdom before youth."

Neatly put, Selina! Bravo, you! There are proposals and proposals, and it is not everybody how gets into a fluster-bluster, and blurts out or creates a ready-made suit.

"Ah, but I begin to feel old! Age is a schemer I begin to scheme."

"There is redoubled fascination sometimes in those who declare they begin to feel old, and catch the unwary on the strong current of untrue confession. That Ducal was a true Herodian after all!

"Is not love always a schemer?" asked Selina after a long pause.

"You know, you evidently know! I am but a disciple," said he, really nervously.

I was afraid Selina was going to laugh. If she had she would certainly have stopped action; for laughter is a non-conductor to stages which may be called "last stages" in the progression of the eternal love-song. (Raillery is a douche on earnestness, anyhow.)

“At whose feet?” said Selina, and her voice deepened, it was grand! Ah! that bass voice of hers was equal to the occasion!

Silence fell. I hardly breathed. I just raised my eyelids a quarter of a tenth part of a half inch, and glanced at the pair. Selina was leaning back on the imperial looking red damask cushions. The Grand Duke was leaning forward, looking as only he could look, spiderly, ugly, but—O, well! he was the Grand Duke, and we come down to it, or up to it, or back to it, as you will.

“Why ask?” (It was a whisper; but, fraught with feeling, it was loud as a spoken word.) Then came another pause. By this time I had become desperately uncomfortable. I wished myself back in the old boat. Gooseberries! go-betweens! O, what should I do?

But the next moment I felt at ease; for the Duke had changed from indecisive wording into a passionate torrent of tropical fervour, that carried me along on its rushing current into absolute indifference to my position. He began to pour out a sudden fire of words, heated straight from the heart (I could not doubt it!)

“You, Selina, shall be my wife! I declare it! Don’t say ‘Yes’ don’t say ‘No’—the thing is out of your reach—you have no say in it. *I* Fritz, declare it. I shall marry you, and that sooner than you can dream of! I shall shatter all negatives with the stern mandate of my will. You are mine, I love you. I loved you in those haunted apartments at Sunbury, and that from the first moment your touch drew me, like a wand, up the stairway I saw the touch embodied in the fair and noble face; I beheld the fine and stately lady who shall be my consort, Ah! I see the vistas of bliss opening before me! We two, Selina, against the problems, and the fashions, and the modes of the world. We two in odd yet perfect, combination will rule and reign in my Principality, Selina!”

He bent forward (it's no use attempting to make a pretty scene out of it) and caught Miss Selina Davidson in a Germanical (and, as far as I must own, quite unresisting) embrace, hug, and outward manifestation of inward and, I suppose, earthly love (as there is no marrying or giving in marriage in heaven, hence all the more necessity for the best bliss of earth being appreciated here), and the contract was concluded.

I rose up, drew down my jersey, stiffened my figure, and advanced from my corner, and stood before them quite unembarrassed. (Earnestness is never embarrassing to any onlooker.)

"It is all very sudden," I. said, "but it is all very real. Selina, let me kiss you." (And I kissed her.) Your Highness, let me congratulate you. Selina is any man's wife.

"I know it," said he, and that's why she shall be mine." (Paradoxical.)

"Now to luncheon. Where is Miss—Miss Pipkin?" he said.

"Ah, yes! Miss Pipkin. It's all a-miss till we turn you young ladies into the English Mrs. and the German Frau." The Ducality was in high good humour.

We lunched, and the band played, and now we all laughed and talked in one happy little circle. The Ducal grew epigrammatic, Sabina spoke in proverbs, Selina in allegories and I in puns. The sun crept downward and hung low by the margin of the river and the trees, in dress of flame, bathed by the glistening banks.

We reached Sonning about 4.30.

Selina had drawn me aside to confab. "We must return at once," she said, "we will drive out, as he wishes it, to his house, and be introduced to his sister (who, he declares, never disputes or questions his actions), and then we will just (as it is his express wish) let him steam us back." Selina glanced at the

boat, which was rocking empty at the end of the tiny line, and said, "He" (it was always "he" now), "he says he shall build a glass-house for it, and keep it like a cucumber (framed?)"

"Ah!" I said, "his language is framed in love, we can all see. I suppose he is anxious to 'ask papa'."

"He says he shall 'tell papa'," said Selina; "a distinction with a difference."

"Keep him in hand, Selina," I said; "the man's silly-conceited, I believe."

"Phœbe! how dare you!"

"O, good-bye, Selina; I see the way Tintoretto jumps. Good-bye!"

"What's that about the cat jumps?" said the Grand Duke. "These English proverbs amuse me; so healthy, so strong, so true."

At Sonning a *char-à-banc* with four superb strawberry-roads met us. If the Grand Duke had had a quarter of the style of one of the two men who sat in solemn silence behind us, he would have passed for the pomp of life translated into flesh-tints. I never saw such a high membranous vertebrate gentleman; such a worldly all-knowing nose in my life. I sat-brooding and speculating why the Grand Duke should look one thing when he was the other thing, and his man look the other thing when he was the one thing. (Chinese conundrum.) We flashed along the quiet roads, the golden glory of the settling sun cheering up the dusty hedges with some of its rich promises.

Nothing like four horses for getting over the ground Selina sat somewhat silent now beside the Grand Duke, who drove and drove well, neither harassing the horses nor making them go with extraordinary steppings or pranceings, but treating them, like the good, kind man he was, with consideration and forethought.

"I must send a wire to my aunt," said Sabina. Our return to-night is unexpected,"

We stopped at a rural post office, and sent a message to say we should be back at 9:30—a neat calculation made by Selina's new-made *fiancé*.

Selina sent two "tels." (by-the-bye) and I sent one. We need not say who the others were for, as everything becomes apparent in due time.

At last we entered a gate with monogram and arms. The woman at the lodge watched us up the long drive with evident interest. I saw her shade her eyes, and I saw her elevate her eyebrows. We drew up at a fine Corinthian-looking bepillared house. We were bustled up a flight of steps by the Grand Duke, and rushed through ante-rooms and up corridors and past beplushed monsters, who seemed turned to stone. At last we paused at a door, approached by another of these ante-rooms, and after one second's halt and a rapid glance at us three he opened it, and ushered us into the presence of "Xenia of the imperial mind."

She was reclining - on a couch at the end of a long room literally stocked with statuary. O creators of the myths of Greece and Rome cut in the pure marble, is there anything in the world of art equal to the splendour of the chisel? I cared nothing for Xenia in comparison with her surroundings.

"Xenia, I bring you a new sister. I am about to be married shortly. Embrace her; she is Selina."

Xenia rose slowly; indifferently, and quite unastonished from her lounge and her book. Certainly she was distinguished, with a subtle distinction which nothing but a peculiar combination of blood, culture, and intimate acquaintance with the best the world can give, produces. She was a contrast in every point to her brother, I need hardly say.

"Is it so?" she said slowly, and with, indeed, great sweetness regarding Selina. Well, Fritz, my brother, I

never expected you to announce your betrothal; but, as a sudden chimera, I am too happy to find your chimera so charming. My brother, you know, is what the world calls an eccentric; but if there were many more whose eccentricities took such a beneficent, happy form as his, we might wish the world was peopled with Fritzes."

"Xenia has always spoilt me," said the Duke. You will have to run her very close, Selina *mia*."

The *mai* did for Selina! She blushed like a cloud at sunset,

We had hardly time to do more than seize an introduction and again seat ourselves in the *char-à-banc*, and once more embark on the launch.

"Life has become a rush," said Selina to me later on.

"I feel breathless; I don't think I shall be able to settle down after this. I feel—I don't know what I feel—but an inexpressible something on a river of unimagined longings."

At last we were nearing Richmond Bridge. The moon made it as light as day.

"Sabina Ann," I said, "do you see a group by the middle parapet?"

"I see a dark object hanging temptingly just between the pillars to the left, as if to bait the fish. What is *that*?"

"That," said I, "is the Pipkin leg."

"Heavens! said Sabina, "I believe it is."

"Sabina, do you see something floating, cloudlike, outward from a manly breast, in wave on wave?"

"I do," said Sabina, "what is that?"

"*That*," said I, "is the Calendar's beard,"

"O, said Sabina, "my heart is jumping madly up and down! I feel—I feel—O, the unexplained emotions that—"

"Sabina, do you see an eye which shines with a discriminating, awful, vivisecting glance at the

objects standing side by side in a remote corner to the left of our launch?

"I do. To whom does that eye belong?"

"Highly tighty, flirty flighty! Sabina, don't you know your own aunt?"

"Spare him and her," said Sabina solemnly.

"Sabina Ann!" I said, and this time I fled away to the other end of the launch and clasped my hand across my heart in a very transport of delight—and what I said, I said to the stars, not to prosy mortals. I said; "O happy stars! If that's the Champion standing there and if ever he should care for me, with that strange unexplained love which makes for matrimony, be sure and let me be rechristened *Rowena*, not Phœbe, for a *Phæbe* I never was and could never be.

FAREWELL

